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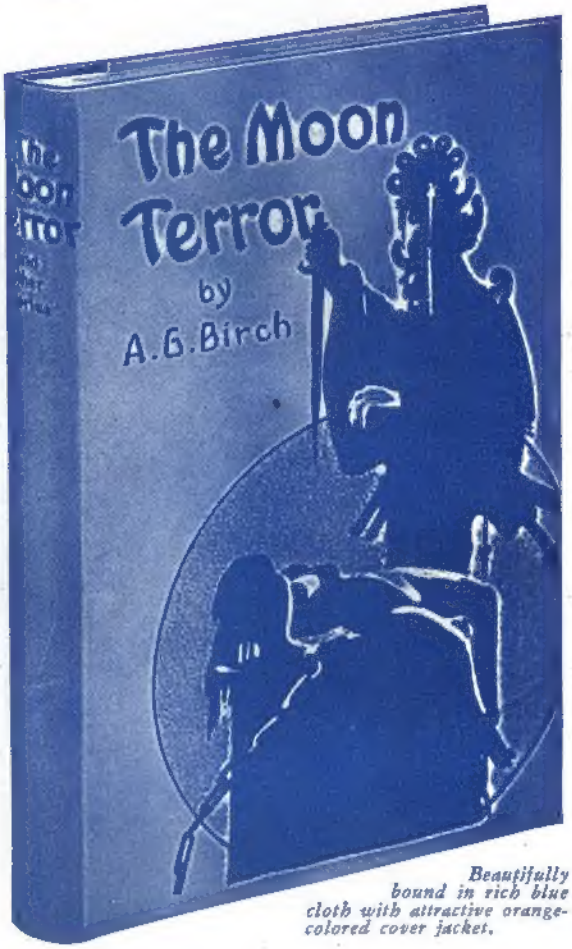

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Good Lord, deliver us!
—*Old Cornish Litany.*

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"They scuttled off pell-mell in mortal fear."

Frozen Beauty

By SEABURY QUINN

A story of Jules de Grandin, and the weird exploit of a great Russian physician who was murdered before he could complete his daring experiment —a fascinating novelette of weird science

THE heat had been intolerable all day, but now a rain was falling, a soft and cooling summer rain that spread a gleaming black veneer across the highway pavement and marked the traffic lamps with cross-shaped fuzzy glows of green and ruby. Falling on our faces as we drove home from the club with the roadster's canvas cover folded back it was cool and gracious, delicate and calm upon our brows as the light touch of a skilful nurse's fingers on a fever-patient's fore-

head, soothing nerves stretched taut by eighteen holes of golf played in a blistering sun.

My friend Jules de Grandin's satisfaction with himself was most annoying. He had ceased playing at the second hole, found a wicker rocker on the clubhouse porch and devoted the entire afternoon to devastation of gin swizzles.

"Tiens," he chuckled, "you are droll, my friend, you English and Americans. You work like Turks and Tartars at your professional vocations, then rest by doing manual labor in the sun. Not I, by blue; I have the self-respect!"

He leant back on the cushions, turning up his forehead to the cooling rain and hummed a snatch of tune:

"La vie est vaine,
Un peu d'amour——"

With a strident screech of brakes I brought the roadster to a stop in time to keep from running down the man who stood before us in the headlights' glare, arm raised imperatively. "Good heavens, man," I rasped, "d'ye want to be run over? You almost——"

"You're a doctor?" he demanded in a sharp, thin voice, pointing to the Medical Society's green cross and gold caduceus on my radiator.

"Yes, but——"

"Please come at once, sir. It's the master, Doctor Pavlovitch. I—I think he's very ill, sir."

The ethics of the medical profession take no account of work-worn nerves, and with a sigh I headed toward the tall gate in the roadside hedge the fellow pointed out. "What seems to be the matter with the doctor?" I inquired as our guide hopped nimbly on the running-board after swinging back the driveway gate.

"I—I don't know, sir," he replied. "Some kind o' stroke, I think. Th' telephone went out of order just at dinner-time—lightning musta hit th' line when th' storm was blowin' up—an' I took th' station wagon to th' village for some things th' grocer hadn't sent. When I got back everythink was dark an' I couldn't seem to make th' lights work, but they flashed on all sudden-like, an' there was Doctor Pavlovitch a-layin' in th' middle o' th' floor, with everythink all messed up in th' study, an' I couldn't seem to rouse him; so I tried to get th' village on th' phone, but it still won't work, and when I tried to start th' station wagon up I found that somethink had gone wrong with it; so I starts to walk down to th' village, an' just then you come down th' road, an' I seen th' little green cross on your car, so——"

"I'll have that darn thing taken off tomorrow," I assured myself; then, aloud, to stop the servant's endless chatter: "All right, we'll do everything we can, but we haven't any medicines or instruments; so maybe we shall have to send you for supplies."

"Yes, sir," he replied respectfully, and to my relief lapsed into momentary silence.

THE big house Doctor Michail Pavlovitch had purchased two years previously and in which he lived in churlish solitude, attended only by his English houseman, sat back on a deep lawn thick set with huge old trees, fenced against the highway by an eight-foot privet hedge and surrounded on the three remaining sides by tall brick walls topped with broken bottles set in mortar. As we circled up the driveway I could feel the eery atmosphere that hovered round the place. It was, I think, the lights which struck me queerly, or, to be more accurate, the absence of familiar lights in a place we knew to be inhabited. Blinds were drawn down tightly, with forbidding secrecy, at

every window; yet between their bottoms and the sills were little lines of luminance which showed against the darkness like a line of gray-white eyeball glimpsed between the lowered eyelids of a corpse.

We hurried down the wide hall to a big room at the rear and paused upon the threshold as the glare of half a dozen strong, unshaded lamps stabbed at our eyes. Everything about the place was topsy-turvy. Drawers had been jerked from desks and literally turned out upon the floor, their contents scattered in fantastic heaps as though they had been stirred with a gigantic spoon. The davenport was pulled apart, its mattress tipped insanely sidewise; pillows were ripped open and gaped like dying things, their gasping mouths disgorging down and kapok. The whole room might have been a movie set at the conclusion of a slapstick farce, except for that which occupied the center of the floor.

In the midst of the fantastic jumble lay a man in dinner clothes, save for the jacket which, sleeves turned half out and linings slit to tatters, was crumpled on a chair. He lay upon his back, his partly-opened eyes fixed on the ceiling where a cluster of electric bulbs blazed white and hard as limelight. He was a big man with a big mustache curled in the fashion of the pre-war days, and what hair he had was touched with gray.

"Gawd, sir, he ain't moved since I left 'im!" the houseman whispered. "Is 'e paralyzed, d'ye think?"

"Completely," nodded Jules de Grandin. "He is very dead, my friend."

"Dead?"

"Like a herring, and unless I miss my guess, he died of murder."

"But there's no blood, no sign of any wound," I interrupted. "I don't believe there was a struggle, even. The place has been ransacked, but——"

"No wound, you say, *mon vieux?*" he broke in as he knelt beside the dead man's head. *"Regardez, s'il vous plaît."* He raised the massive, almost hairless head, and pointed with a well-groomed finger to a gleaming silver stud protruding from the flesh. Plunged in the rather beefy neck a tiny silver-headed bodkin showed. Less than half an inch of haft protruded, for the little awl was driven deep into that fatal spot, the medulla oblongata, with deadly accuracy. Death had been instantaneous and bloodless.

"How——" I began, but he shut me off with an unpleasant laugh as he rose and brushed his knees.

"Cherchez la femme," he murmured. "This is undoubtlessly a woman's work, and the work of one who knew him quite well. All the evidence suggests it. A little, tiny bodkin driven into the brain; a woman's weapon. Probably she did it with her arms about his neck; a woman's finesse, that. Who she was and why she did it, and what she and her confederates looked for when they made a bears' den of this place is for the police to determine."

Turning to the servant he demanded: "This Doctor Pavlovitch, did he have callers in the afternoon?"

"No sir, not as I knows of. He was a queer 'un, sir, though he was a proper gentleman. Never had no callers I remember, never used th' telephone while I was here. If anybody ever come to see 'im they done it while I was away."

"One sees. Did he ever mention fearing anyone, or suspecting that he might be robbed?"

"Him? Lor, sir, no! Six foot three in 'is stockin's, 'e was, an' could bend iron bars in 'is bare hands. I seen 'im do it more'n once. Had a regular harsenal o' guns an' things, too, 'e did, an' kept th' house locked like a jail. Didn't take

no chances on a robbery, sir, but I wouldn't say he was afraid. He'd 'a been a nasty customer in a row; if anyone 'ad broken in he'd 'a give 'em what-for good an' proper, sir."

"U'm?" Going to the telephone the little Frenchman raised the instrument from its forked cradle and held it to his ear. *"Parbleu!"* he pressed the contact bar down with a triple rattle, then dropped the speaking-tube back in its rack. "Remain here, if you please," he bade the servant as he motioned me to follow. Outside, he whispered: "There is no dial tone discernible. The line is cut."

WE CIRCLED round the house seeking the connection, and beside a chimney found the inlet. The wires had been neatly clipped, and the fresh-cut copper showed as bright against the severed insulation as a wound against dark flesh.

"What d'ye make of it?" I asked as he knelt on the wet grass and searched the ground for traces of the wire-cutters. "Think that chap inside knows more than he pretends?"

"Less, if possible," he said shortly. "Such stupidity as his could not be simulated. Besides, I know his type. Had he been implicated in a murder or a robbery he would have set as great a distance between him and the crime-scene as he could." With a shrug of resignation he straightened to his feet and brushed the leaf-mold from his trousers. "No tracks of any sort," he murmured. "The grass grows close against the house, and the rain has washed away what little tale the miscreants' footprints might have told. Let us go back. We must inform the police and the coroner."

"Want me to take the car and notify 'em?" I asked as we turned the corner of the house. "It's hardly safe to trust the servant out of sight before the officers have had a chance to question him, and you don't drive, so——"

The pressure of his fingers on my elbow silenced me, and we drew back in the shelter of the ivy-hung wall as the crunch of wheels came to us from the lower driveway.

"What the deuce?" I wondered as I glimpsed the vehicle between the rain-drenched trees. "What's an express van doing here this time o' night?"

"Let us make ourselves as inconspicuous as possible," he cautioned in a whisper. "It may be that they plan a ruse for entering the house, and——"

"But good heavens, man, they've already gone through it like termites through a log," I interjected.

"Ah bah, you overlook the patent possibilities, my friend. What do we really know? Only that Doctor Pavlovitch was murdered and his study ransacked. But why do people search a place? To find something they want, *n'est-ce-pas?* That much is obvious. Still, we do not know they found the thing they sought, or, if they found it, we cannot say that others do not also seek it. It must have been a thing of value to have caused them to do murder."

"You mean there may be two gangs hunting something Pavlovitch had hidden in his house?"

"It is quite possible. He was a Russian, and Russia is synonymous with mystery today. The old noblesse have smuggled fortunes from the country, or have plans for getting out the treasures they could not take with them in flights; plots and counterplots, intrigue, plans for assassination or revenge are natural to a Russian as fleas are to a dog. I think it wholly possible that more than one conspiracy to deprive the amiable Pavlovitch of life and fortune has been in progress, and he would not have been a good insurance

risk even if the ones who murdered him tonight had done their work less thoroughly."

The big green truck had drawn up at the steps and a man in express uniform hopped out. "Doctor Pavlovitch?" he asked when the houseman answered to his thunderous banging at the knocker.

"No-o, sir," gulped the servant, "the doctor isn't home just now——"

"Okay, pal. Will you sign for this consignment and give us a lift with it? It's marked urgent."

With grunts and exclamations of exertion, plus a liberal allowance of the sort of language prized by soldiers, stevedores and sailors, the great packing-case was finally wrestled up the steps and dropped unceremoniously in the hall. The express van turned down the drive, and we slipped from our concealment to find Pavlovitch's houseman gazing at the giant parcel ruefully.

"What'll I do with it now, sir?" he asked de Grandin. "I know th' doctor was expectin' somethink of th' sort, for he told me so hisself this mornin'; but 'e didn't tell me what it was, an' I don't know whether I should open it or leave it for th' officers."

De Grandin tweaked an end of waxed mustache between his thumb and forefinger as he regarded the great crate. It was more than six feet long, something more than three feet wide, and better than a yard in height.

"Eh bien," he answered, "I think the citizens of Troy were faced with the same problem. They forbore to open that which came to them, with most deplorable results. Let us not be guilty of the same mistake. Have you a crowbar handy?"

WHOEVER put that case together had intended it to stand rough usage, for the two-inch planks that formed it were secured with mortises and water-swollen dowels, so though the three of us attacked it furiously it was upward of an hour ere we forced the first board loose; and that proved only the beginning, for so strongly were the shooks attached to one another that our task was more like breaking through a solid log than ripping a joined box apart. Finally the last plank of the lid came off and revealed a packing of thick felt.

"Que diable?" snapped de Grandin as he struck his crowbar on the heavy wadding. "What is this?"

What did you expect?" I queried as I mopped a handkerchief across my face.

"A man, perhaps a pair of them, by blue!" he answered. "It would have made an ideal hiding-place. Equipped with inside fasteners, it could have been thrown open in the night, permitting those who occupied it to come forth and search the place at leisure."

"Humph, there's certainly room for a man or two in there," I nodded, prodding tentatively at the black felt wadding with my finger, "but how would he get air—I say!"

"What is it?" he demanded. "You have discovered something——"

"Feel this," I interrupted, "it seems to me it's——"

"Parbleu, but you have right!" he exclaimed as he laid his hand against the felt. "It is cool, at least ten degrees cooler than the atmosphere. Let us hasten to unearth the secret of this *sacré* chest, my friends, but let us also work with caution. It may contain a charge of liquid air."

"Liquid air?" I echoed as with the heavy shears the servant brought he started cutting at the layers of laminated felt.

"Certainement. Liquid air, my friend. Brought in sudden contact with warm

atmosphere it would vaporize so quickly that the force of its expansion would be equal to a dynamite explosion. I have seen it——"

"But that's fantastic," I objected. "Who would choose such an elaborate——"

"Who would choose a woman's bodkin to dispatch the learned Doctor Pavlovitch?" he countered. "It would have been much simpler to have shot him; yet —*morbleu,* what have we here?"

The final layer of felt had been laid back, and before us gleamed a chest of polished dark red wood, oblong in shape, with slightly rounded top with chamfered edges and a group of Chinese ideographs incised upon it. I had seen a case like that but once before, but I recognized it instantly. A friend of mine had died while traveling in Mongolia, and when they shipped his body home . . . "Why, it's a Chinese coffin!" I exclaimed.

"*Précisément, un cercueil de bois chinois,* but what in Satan's name does it do here? And behold, observe, my friend; it, too, is cold."

He was correct. The polished puncheon of Mongolian cedar was so cold that I could hardly bear to rest my hand upon it.

"I wonder what those characters stand for?" I mused. "If we could read them they might give some clue——"

"I do not think so," he replied. "I can make them out; they are the customary *hong* for Chinese coffins, and mean *cheung sang*—long life."

" 'Long life!'—on a coffin lid?"

"But yes. *C'est drôle ça,*" he agreed. "It seems the heathen in his blindness has hopes of immortality, and does not decorate his tombs with skulls and cross-bones, or with pious, gloomy verses in the Christian manner. However"—he raised his narrow shoulders in a shrug—"we have still the puzzle of this so cold coffin to be solved. Let us be about it, but with caution."

With more care than the average dentist shows when he explores a tooth, he bored a small hole in the cedar with an auger, pausing every now and then to test the temperature of the small bit against his hand. Some thirty seconds later he leaped back. "I have struck nothingness; the bit is through—stand clear!" he cautioned, and a gentle hissing followed like an echo of his warning as a plume-like jet of feathery remex geysered upward from the coffin lid.

"Carbon dioxide snow!" we chorused; and:

"*Tiens,* it seems we shall not listen to the angels' songs immediately," added Jules de Grandin with a laugh.

The casket followed usual Chinese patterns. Made from a single hollowed log with top and bottom joined by dowels, it was covered with successive coats of lacquer which made it seem an undivided whole, and it was not till we searched some time that we were able to discern the line between the lid and body. A series of small auger-holes was driven in the wood, and with these for starting-points we had begun the arduous task of prizing off the heavy lid when the sudden screech of brakes before the house gave warning of a new arrival.

"Take cover!" bade de Grandin, dropping down behind the massive coffin as he drew his pistol. "If they think to carry us by storm we shall be ready for——"

"MICHAIL — Michailovitch, has it come? Proudhon and Matrona are here; we must make haste! Where are you, man?" Rattling at the knob, kicking on the panels, someone clamored at the front door furiously, then, as we gave no sign, burst out in a torrent of

entreaty phrased in words that seemed entirely consonants.

De Grandin left his ambush, tiptoed down the hall and shot the bolt back from the door, leaping quickly to one side and poising with bent knees, his pistol held in readiness. The heavy door swung inward with a bang and a young man almost fell across the sill.

"Michail," he called hysterically, "they're here; I saw them on the road today. Has it come, Michail—oh, my God!"—as he saw the coffin stripped of its enclosures standing in the glaring light from the hall chandelier—"too late; too late!" He stumbled blindly a few steps, slumped down to his knees, then crept across the polished floor, dropping head and hands upon the coffin lid and sobbing broken-heartedly. "Nikakova, *radost moya!*" he entreated. "Oh, too late; too late!"

"*Tenez, Monsieur,* you seem in trouble," de Grandin moved from his concealment and advanced a step, pistol lowered but eyes wary.

"Proudhon!" the stranger half rose from his knees and a look of utter loathing swept his face. "You——" His furious expression faded and gave way to one of wonder. "You're not—who are you?" he stammered.

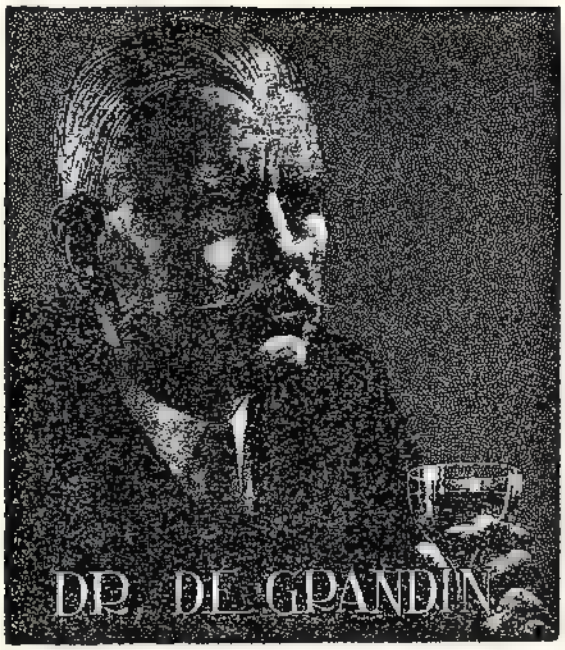
"*Eh bien,* my friend, I think that we might say the same to you," de Grandin answered. "It might be well if you explained yourself without delay. A murder has been done here and we seek the perpetrators——"

"A murder? Who——"

"Doctor Pavlovitch was murdered something like an hour ago; we are expecting the police——"

"Pavlovitch killed? It must be Proudhon was here, then," the young man breathed. "Was this coffin like this when you found it?"

"It was not. It came after Doctor Pavlovitch was murdered. We suspected it might be connected with the crime and were about to force it when you came howling at the door——"



"Quick, then! We must take it off before——"

"One moment, if you please, *Monsieur.* A murder has been done and everyone about the place is suspect till he clears himself. This so mysterious parcel came while we were seeking clues, and neither it nor any other thing may be removed until the police——"

"We can't wait for the police! They wouldn't understand; they'd not believe; they'd wait until it is too late—oh, *Monsieur,* I don't know who you are, but I beg that you will help me. I must remove this coffin right away; get it to a safe place and have medical assistance, or——"

"I am Doctor Jules de Grandin and this is Doctor Samuel Trowbridge, both at your service if you can convince us that you have no criminal intent," the little Frenchman said. "Why must you rush away this casket which was brought here but a little while ago, and why should

you desire to keep its presence hidden from the officers?"

A look of desperation crossed the other's face. He laid his forehead on the chilly coffin top again and burst into a fit of weeping. Finally: "You are educated men, physicians, and may understand," he murmured between sobs. "You must believe me when I tell you that unless we take this coffin out at once a terrible calamity will follow!"

De Grandin eyed him speculatively. "I will take the chance that what you say is true, *Monsieur,*" he answered. "You have a motorcar outside? Good. Doctor Trowbridge will accompany you and guide you to our house. I shall stay and wait until the police have been notified and aid them with such information as I have. Then I shall rejoin you."

Turning to the servant he commanded: "Help us place this box upon the motor, if you please; then hasten to the nearest neighbor's and telephone the officers. I await you here."

With the long box hidden in the tonneau of his touring-car the young man hugged my rear fender all the way to town, and was at my side and ready to assist in packing the unwieldy case into the house almost before I shut my motor off. Once in the surgery, he crept furtively from one window to another, drawing down the blinds and listening intently, as though he were in mortal fear of spies.

"Well, now, young fellow," I began as he completed his mysterious precautions, "what's all this about? Let me warn you, if you've got a body hidden in that casket it's likely to go hard with you. I'm armed, and if you make a false move——" Reaching in my jacket pocket I snapped my glasses-case to simulate—I hoped!—the clicking of a pistol being cocked, and frowned at him severely.

The smile of child-like confidence he gave me was completely reassuring. "I've no wish to run away, sir," he assured me. "If it hadn't been for you they might have—Jesu-Mary, what is that?" He thrust himself before the red wood coffin as though to shield it with his body as a rattle sounded at the office door.

"Salut, mes amis!" de Grandin greeted as he strode into the surgery. "I am fortunate. The *gendarmes* kept me but a little while, and I rode back to town with the mortician who brought in the doctor's body. You have not opened it? *Très bon.* I shall be delighted to assist you."

"Yes, let us hurry, please," our visitor begged. "It has been so long——" a sob choked in his throat, and he put his hand across his eyes.

The wood was heavy but not hard, and our tools cut through it easily. In fifteen minutes we had forced a lengthwise girdle round the box, and bent to lift the lid.

"Nikakova!" breathed the young man as a worshipper might speak the name of some saint he adored.

"Sacré nom d'un fromage vert!" de Grandin swore.

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated.

A coat of hoarfrost fell away in flakes, and beneath it showed a glassy dome with little traceries of rime upon it. Between the lace-like meshes of the gelid veil we glimpsed a woman lying quiet as in sleep. There was a sort of wavering radiance about her not entirely attributable to the icy envelope enclosing her. Rather, it seemed to me, she matched the brilliant beams of the electric light with some luminescence of her own. Nude she was as any Aphrodite sculptured by the master-craftsmen of the Isle of Melos; a cloven tide of pale-gold hair fell down each side her face and rippled over ivory shoulders, veiling the pink nipples of the full-blown, low-set bosoms and coursing

down the beautifully shaped thighs until it reached the knees. The slender, shapely feet were crossed like those on mediæval tombs whose tenants have in life made pilgrimage to Rome or Palestine; her elbows were bent sharply so her hands were joined together palm to palm between her breasts with fingertips against her chin. I could make out gold-flecked lashes lying in smooth arcs against her pallid cheeks, the faint shadows round her eyes, the wistful, half-pathetic droop of her small mouth. Oddly, I was conscious that this pallid, lovely figure typified in combination the austerity of sculptured saint, lush, provocative young womanhood and the innocent appeal of childhood budding into adolescence. Somehow, it seemed to me, she had lain down to die with a trustful resignation like that of Juliet when she drained the draft that sent her living to her family's mausoleum.

"Nikakova!" whispered our companion in a sort of breathless ecstasy, gazing at the quiet figure with a look of rapture.

"Hein?" de Grandin shook himself as though to free his senses from the meshes of a dream. "What is this, *Monsieur?* A woman tombed in ice, a beautiful, dead woman——"

"She is not dead," the other interrupted. "She sleeps."

"Tiens," a look of pity glimmered in the little Frenchman's small blue eyes, "I fear it is the sleep that knows no waking, *mon ami.*"

"No, no, I tell you," almost screamed the young man, "she's not dead! Pavlovitch assured me she could be revived. We were to begin work tonight, but they found him first, and——"

"Halte la!" de Grandin bade. "This is the conversation of the madhouse, as meaningless as babies' babble. Who was this Doctor Pavlovitch, and who was this young woman? Who, by blue, are you, *Monsieur?"*

The young man paid no heed, but hastened around the coffin, feeling with familiar fingers for a series of small buttons which he pressed in quick succession. As the final little knob was pressed we heard a slowly rising, prolonged hiss, and half a dozen feathery jets of snowflakes seemed to issue from the icy dome above the body. The room grew cold and colder. In a moment we could see the vapor of our breaths before our mouths and noses, and I felt a chill run through me as an almost overwhelming urge to sneeze began to manifest itself.

"Corbleu," de Grandin's teeth were chattering with the sudden chill, "I shall take pneumonia; I shall contract coryza; I shall perish miserably if this continues!" He crossed the room and threw a window open, then leant across the sill, fairly soaking in the moist, warm summer air.

"Quick, shut the lights off!" cried our visitor. "They must not see us!" He snapped the switch with frenzied fingers, then leaned against the door-jamb breathing heavily, like one who has escaped some deadly peril by the narrowest of margins.

As the outside air swept through the room and neutralized the chill, de Grandin turned again to the young man. *"Monsieur,"* he warned, "my nose is short, but my patience is still shorter. I have had enough—too much, *parbleu!* Will you explain this business of the monkey now, or do I call the officers and tell them that you carry round the body of a woman, one whom you doubtless foully murdered, and——"

"No, no, not that!" the visitor besought. "Please don't betray me. Listen, please; try to realize what I say is true."

"My friend, you cannot put too great a strain on my credulity," de Grandin answered. "Me, I have traveled much, seen much, know much. The things which I know to be true would make a

less experienced man believe himself the victim of hallucinations. Say on, *mon vieux;* I listen."

WITH steamer rugs draped around our shoulders we faced each other in the light of a small, shaded lamp. Our breath fanned out in vapory cumuli each time we spoke; before us gleamed the crystal-hooded coffin, like a great memento mori fashioned out of polar ice, and as it radiated ever-growing cold I caught myself involuntarily recalling a couplet from Bartholomew Dowling:

> "And thus does the warmth of feeling
> Turn chill in the coldness of death . . ."

Till then the rush of action had prevented any inventory of our visitor. Now as I studied him I found it difficult to fit him into any category furnished by a lifetime's medical experience. He was young, though not as young as he appeared, for pale-blond coloring and slenderness lent him a specious air of youth which was denied by drooping shoulders, trouble-lines about his mouth and deep-set, melancholy eyes. His chin was small and gentle, not actually receding, but soft and almost feminine in outline. The mouth, beneath a scarcely-visible ash-blond mustache, suggested extreme sensitiveness, and he held his lips compressed against each other as though the trait of self-suppression had become habitual. His brow was wider and more high than common, his blue eyes almost childishly ingenuous. When he spoke, it was with hesitancy and with a painfully correct pronunciation which betrayed as plainly as an accent that his English came from study rather than inheritance and use.

"I am Serge Aksakoff," he told us in his flat, accentless voice. "I met Nikakova Gapon when I was a student at the University of Petrograd and she a pupil at the Imperial Ballet Academy. Russia in 1916 was honeycombed with secret liberal societies, all loyal to the Little Father, but all intent on securing something of democracy for a land which had lain prostrate underneath the iron heel of autocrats for twenty generations. Perhaps it was the thrill of danger which we shared; perhaps it was a stronger thing; at any rate we felt a mutual attraction at first meeting, and before the summer ended I was desperately in love with her and she returned my passion.

"Our society numbered folk of every social stratum, workmen, artizans, artists and professional people, but mostly we were students ranging anywhere from twenty to sixteen years old. Two of our foremost members were Boris Proudhon and Matrona Rimsky. He was a tailor, she the mistress of Professor Michail Pavlovitch of the University of Petrograd, who as a physicist was equal to Soloviev in learning and surpassed him in his daring of experiment. Proudhon was always loudest in debate, always most insistent on aggressive action. If one of us prepared a plan for introducing social legislation in the Duma he scoffed at the idea and insisted on a show of force, often on assassination of officials whose duties were to carry out unpopular ukases. Matrona always seconded his violent proposals and insisted that we take direct and violent action. Finally, at their suggestion, we signed our names beneath theirs to a declaration of intention in which we stated that if peaceful measures failed we favored violence to gain our ends.

"That night the officers of the Okhrana roused me from my bed and dragged me to the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. They locked me in a stinking, vermin-swarming cell and left me there three weeks. Then they led me out and told me that because I was but seventeen they

had decided to extend me clemency; so instead of being hanged or sent to the Siberian mines with most of my companions I was merely to be exiled to Ekaterinburg for a term of sixty months. During that time I was to be subjected to continuous surveillance, to hold no communication with my family or friends in Russia, and not engage in any occupation without express permission."

"But you'd done nothing!" I protested. "The paper that you signed declared specifically that you favored peaceful measures; you merely said that if these measures failed——"

Aksakoff smiled sadly. "You didn't have to be a criminal to be exiled," he explained. " 'Political unreliability' was sufficient cause, and the officers of the political police were sole judges of the case. You see, administrative exile, as they called it, was technically not a punishment."

"Oh, that's different," I replied. "If you were merely forced to live away from home——"

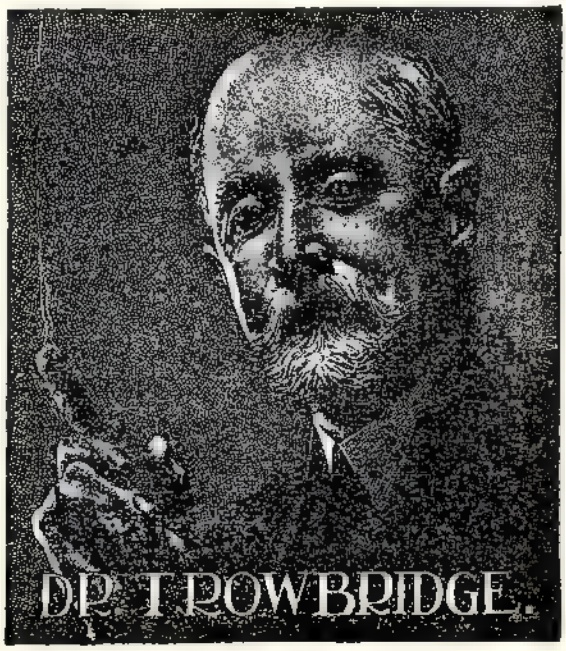
"And to make a journey longer than from New York to Los Angeles dressed in prison clothes and handcuffed to a condemned felon, shuffling in irons so heavy that it was impossible to lift your feet, to be fed infrequently, and then on offal that nothing but a half-starved dog —or man—would touch," he interrupted bitterly. "My only consolation was that Nikakova had been also granted 'clemency' and accompanied me in exile.

"The officer commanding our escort came from a family some of whom had also suffered exile, and this made him pity us. He allowed us to converse an hour a day, although this was prohibited, and several times he gave us food and tea from his own rations. It was from him we learned that Proudhon and Matrona were *agents provocateurs* of the political police, paid spies whose duty was not only to worm their way into the confidence of unsuspecting children such as we, but to incite us to unlawful acts so we might be arrested and deported.

"Since I had no money and the Government did not care to fee me, I was graciously permitted to take service with a cobbler at Ekaterinburg, and Nikakova was allowed to do work for a seamstress. Presently I found a little cottage and she came to live with me."

"It must have been some consolation to be married to the girl you loved, even in such terrible conditions——" I began, but the cynicism of the look he gave me stopped my well-meant comment.

"I said she came to live with me," he repeated. " 'Politicos' were not permitted marriage without special dispensation from the police, and this we could not get. We had no money to pay bribes. But whatever church and state might say, we were as truly man and wife as if we'd stood before the altar of St. Isaac's and been married by the Patriarch. We pledged our love for time and all eternity kneeling on the floor of our mean cabin



with a blessèd ikon for our witness, and because we had no rings to give each other I took two nails and beat them into circlets. Look——"

He thrust his hand out, displaying a thin band of flattened wire on the second shaft of the third finger.

"She had one, too," he added, beckoning us to look upon the body in the frost-domed coffin. Through the envelope of shrouding ice we saw the dull gleam of the narrow iron ring upon one of the shapely folded hands.

"IN THAT northern latitude the twilight lasts till after ten o'clock, and my labors with the cobbler started with the sunrise and did not end till dark," Aksakoff continued as he resumed his seat and lit the cigarette de Grandin proffered. "There is an English saying that shoemakers' children go unshod. It was almost literally true in my case, for the tiny wage I earned made it utterly impossible for me to purchase leather shoes, and so I wound rags round my feet and ankles. Nikakova had a pair of shoes, but wore them only out of doors. As for stockings, we hadn't owned a pair between us since the first month of our exile.

"One evening as I shuffled home in my rag boots I heard a groan come from the shadows, and when I went to look I found an old man fallen by the way. He was pitifully thin and ragged, and his matted, unkempt beard was almost stiff with filth and slime. We who lived in utter poverty could recognize starvation when we saw it, and it needed but a single glance to see the man was famishing. He was taller by a head than I, but I had no trouble lifting him, for he weighed scarcely ninety pounds, and when I put my arm round him to steady him it was as if I held a rag-clothed skeleton.

"Nikakova helped me get his ragged clothing off and wash away the clotted filth and vermin; then we laid him on a pile of straw, for we had no bedsteads, and fed him milk and brandy with a spoon. At first we thought him too far gone for rescue, but after we had worked with him an hour or so his eyes came open and he murmured, 'Thank you, *Gaspadin* Aksakoff.'

"'*Gaspadin!*' It was the first time I had heard that title of respect since the night the police dragged me from my bed almost a year before, and I burst out crying when the old man mumbled it. Then we fell to wondering. Who was this old rack of bones, clothed in stinking rags, filthy as a mujik and verminous as a mangy dog, who knew my name and addressed me with a courteous title? Exiles learn to suspect every change of light and shadow, and Nikakova and I spent a night of terror, starting at each footstep in the alley, almost fainting every time a creak came at our lockless door for fear it might be officers of the *gendarmerie* come to take us for affording shelter to a fugitive.

"The starving stranger rallied in the night and by morning had sufficient strength to tell us he was Doctor Pavlovitch, seized by the Okhrana as a politically dangerous person and exiled for five years to Ekaterinburg. Less fortunate than we, he had been unable to obtain employment even as a manual laborer when the Government, preoccupied with war and threat of revolution, had turned him out to live or starve as fate decreed. For months he'd wandered through the streets like a stray animal, begging kopeks here and there, fighting ownerless dogs and cats for salvage from swill-barrels; finally he dropped exhausted in his tracks within a hundred yards of our poor cabin.

"We had hardly food enough for two, and often less than the equivalent of a

dime a week in cash, but somehow we contrived to keep our guest alive through the next winter, and when spring came he found work upon a farm.

"The forces of revolt had passed to stronger hands than ours, and while we starved at Ekaterinburg Tsar Nicholas came there as an exile, too. But though the Bolsheviki ruled instead of Nicholas it only meant a change of masters for the three of us. Petrograd and all of Russia was in the hands of revolutionists so busy with their massacres and vengeances that they had no time or inclination to release us from our exile, and even if we had been freed we had no place to go. With the coming of the second revolution everything was communized; the Red Guards took whatever they desired with no thought of payment; tradesmen closed their shops and peasants planted just enough to keep themselves. We had been poor before; now we were destitute. Sometimes we had but one crust of black bread to share among us, often not even that. For a week we lived on Nikakova's shoes, cutting them in little strips and boiling them for hours to make broth.

"The Bolsheviks shot Nicholas and his family on July 17, and eight days later Kolchak and the Czechs moved into Ekaterinburg. Pavlovitch was recognized and retained to assist in the investigation of the murder of the royal family, and we acted as his secretaries. When the White Guards moved back toward Mongolia we went with them. Pavlovitch set up a laboratory and hospital at Tisingol, and Nikakova and I acted as assistants. We were very happy there."

"One rejoices in your happiness, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin murmured when the young man's silence lengthened, "but how was it that Madame Aksakoff was frozen in this never quite sufficiently to be reprobated coffin?"

Our visitor started from his revery. "There was fighting everywhere," he answered. "Town after town changed hands as Red and White Guards moved like chessmen on the Mongol plains, but we seemed safe enough at Tisingol till Nikakova fell a victim to taiga fever. She hovered between life and death for weeks, and was still too weak to walk, or even stand, when word came that the Red horde was advancing and destroying everything before it. If we stayed our dooms were sealed; to attempt to move her meant sure death for Nikakova.

"I told you Pavlovitch was one of Russia's foremost scientists. In his work at Tisingol he had forestalled discoveries made at great universities of the outside world. The Leningrad physicians' formula for keeping blood ionized and fluid, that it might be in readiness for instant use when transfusions were required, was an everyday occurrence at the Tisingol infirmary, and Carrell's experiment of keeping life in chicken hearts after they were taken from the fowls had been surpassed by him. His greatest scientific feat, however, was to take a small warm-blooded animal — a little cat or dog — drug it with an opiate, then freeze it solid with carbonic oxide snow, keep it in refrigeration for a month or two, then, after gently thawing it, release it, apparently no worse for its experience.

" 'There is hope for Nikakova,' he told me when the news came that the Bolsheviks were but two days away. 'If you will let me treat her as I do my pets, she can be moved ten thousand miles in safety, and revived at any time we wish.'

"I would not consent, but Nikakova did. 'If Doctor Pavlovitch succeeds we shall be together once again,' she told me, 'but if we stay here we must surely

die. If I do not live through the ordeal —*nichevo,* I am so near death already that the step is but a little one, and thou shalt live, my Serge. Let us try this one chance of escape.'

"Pavlovitch secured a great Mongolian coffin and we set about our work. Nikakova was too weak to take me in her arms, but we kissed each other on the mouth before she drank ten drops of laudanum which sent her into a deep sleep within half an hour. The freezing process had to be immediate, so that animation would come to a halt at once; otherwise her little strength would be depleted by contending with the chill and she would really die, and not just halt her vital processes. We stripped her bedrobe off and set her hands in prayer and crossed her feet as though she came back from a pious pilgrimage, then sealed her lips with flexible collodion and stopped her nasal orifices; then, before she had a chance to suffocate, we laid her on a sheet stretched on carbonic oxide snow, spread another sheet above her and covered her with a sheet-copper dome into which we forced compressed carbonic oxide. The temperature inside her prison was so low her body stiffened with a spasm, every drop of blood and moisture in her system almost instantly congealing. Then we laid her in a shallow bath of distilled water which we froze as hard as steel with dry ice, and left her there while we prepared the coffin which was to be her home until we reached a place of safety.

"PAVLOVITCH had made the coffin ready, putting tanks of liquefied carbonic oxide underneath the space reserved for the ice plinth and arranging vents so that the gas escaping from the liquid's slow evaporation might circulate continuously about the icy tomb in which my darling lay. Around the ice block we set a hollow form of ice to catch and hold escaping gases, then wrapped the whole in layer on layer of *yurta,* or tent-felt, and put it in the coffin, which we sealed with several coats of Chinese lacquer. Thus my loved one lay as still as any sculptured saint, sealed in a tomb of ice as cold as those *zaberegas,* or ice mountains, that form along the banks of rivers in Siberia when the mercury goes down to eighty marks below the zero line.

"We trekked across the Shamo desert till we came to Dolo Nor, then started down the Huang Ho, but just north of Chiangchun a band of Chahar bandits raided us. Me they carried off to hold for ransom, and it was three days before I made them understand I was a penniless White Russian for whom no one cared a kopek. They would have killed me out of hand had not an English prisoner offered them five pounds in ransom for me. Six months later I arrived at Shanghai with nothing but the rags I stood in.

"White Russians have no status in the East, but this was helpful to me, for jobs no other foreigner would touch were offered me. I was in turn a ricksha boy, a German secret agent, a runner for a gambling-house, an opium smuggler and gun runner. At every turn my fortunes mounted. In ten years I was rich, the owner of concessions in Kalgan, Tientsin and Peiping, not much respected, but much catered to. *Maskee*"—he raised his shoulders in a shrug—"I'd have traded everything I owned for that red coffin that had vanished when the Chahars captured me.

"Then at last I heard of Pavlovitch. He had been made the surgeon of the bandit party which co-operated with the one that captured me, and when they were incorporated in the Chinese army had become a colonel. When he saved a war lord's life by transfusion of canned

blood they presented him with half a city's loot. Shortly afterward he emigrated to America. The coffin? When the Chahars first saw it they assumed that it was filled with treasure and were about to smash it open, but its unnatural coldness frightened them, and they buried it beneath the ice near Bouir Nor and scuttled off pellmell in mortal fear of the ten thousand devils which Pavlovitch assured them were confined in it.

"It cost me two years and a fortune to locate Nikakova's burial-place, but finally we found it, and so deeply had they buried her beneath the *zaberega's* never-melting ice that we had to blast to get my darling out. We wrapped the coffin in ten folds of tent-felt wet with ice-and-salt solution, and took it overland to Tientsin, where I put it in a ship's refrigeration chamber and brought it to America. Yesterday I reached this city with it, having brought it here in a refrigeration car, and all arrangements had been made for Pavlovitch to revive Nikakova when—this afternoon I saw Proudhon and the Rimsky woman driving down the road toward Pavlovitch's house and knew that we must hasten."

"Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur, but why should seeing your confrères of Russian days impress you with this need for desperate haste?" de Grandin asked.

Aksakoff smiled bleakly. "Do you remember what befell the people who investigated the assassination of the Tsar?" he answered. "The assassins covered up their bloody work completely, so they thought; burned the bodies in a bonfire and threw the ashes down the shaft of an abandoned mine, but patient research under Sokoloff made all precautions useless. It was Pavlovitch whose work unearthed the evidence of crime. From the ashes in the old Isetsky mine he sifted litle bits of evidence, the Emperor's Maltese cross, six sets of steels from women's corsets, a mixed assortment of charred buttons, buckles, parts of slippers, hooks and eyes, and a number of small dirty pebbles which, when cleaned and treated chemically, turned out to be pure diamonds. It was this evidence which proved the Bolsheviki's guilt—after they bare-facedly denied all implication in the regicide, and all who helped to prove their guilt were marked for 'execution' —even those who occupied the posts of clerks have been run down and murdered by their secret agents. There is no doubt Proudhon and the woman who was Pavlovitch's mistress — and whose betrayal caused his exile in the Tsarist days—were sent here to assassinate him. It was unquestionably that female Judas who killed Pavlovitch, and after he was dead she and Proudhon rummaged through his papers. Their task is not only to stop oral testimony of their Government's guilt, but to destroy incriminating documents, as well."

"One sees. And it is highly probable they found messages from you to him, advising him of your arrival. *Tiens,* I think that you were well advised to take this coffin from the house of death without delay."

"But in killing Pavlovitch they killed my darling, too!" sobbed Aksakoff. "The technique of his work was secret. No one else can bring belovèd Nikakova from her trance——"

"I would not say as much," denied the little Frenchman. "I am Jules de Grandin, and a devilish clever fellow. Let us see what we shall see, my friend."

"It's the most fantastic thing I ever heard!" I told him as we went to bed. "There's no doubt the freezing process has preserved her wonderfully, but to hope to bring her back to life—that's ut-

terly absurd. When a person dies, he's dead, and I'd stake my reputation that's nothing but a lovely corpse in there," I nodded toward the bathroom where the plinth of ice stood in the tub and Aksakoff stretched on a pallet by the bolted door, a pistol ready in his hand.

De Grandin pursed his lips, then turned an impish grin on me. "You have logic and the background of experience to support your claims," he nodded, "but as Monsieur Shakespeare says, heaven and earth contain things our philosophy has not yet dreamed of. As for logic, *eh bien*, what is it? A reasoning from collated data, from known facts, *n'est-ce-pas?* But certainly. Logically, therefore, wireless telegraphy was scientifically impossible before Marconi. Radio communication was logically an absurd dream till invention of the vacuum tube made former scientific logic asinine. Yet the principles that underlay these things were known to physicists for years; they simply had not been assembled in their proper order. Let us view this case:

"Take, by example, hibernating animals, the tortoise of our northern climates, the frog, the snake; every autumn they put by their animation as a housewife folds up summer clothes for winter storage. They appear to die, yet in the spring they sally forth as active as they were before. One not versed in natural lore might come upon them in their state of hibernation and say as you just said, 'This is a corpse.' His experience would tell him so, yet he would be in error. Or take the fish who freezes in the ice. When spring dissolves his icy prison he swims off in search of food as hungrily as if he had not paused a moment in his quest. The toad encrusted in a block of slate, such as we see unearthed in coal mines now and then, may have been 'dead' *le bon Dieu* only knows how many centuries; yet once release him from encasement and he hops away in search of bugs to fill his little belly. Again——"

"But these are all cold-blooded creatures," I protested. "Mammals can't suspend the vital process——"

"Not even bears?" he interrupted with mock-mildness. "Or those Indians who when hypnotized fall into such deep trances that accredited physicians do not hesitate to call them dead, and are thereafter buried for so long a time that crops of grain are sown and harvested above them, then, disinterred, are reawakened at the hypnotist's command?"

"Humph," I answered, nettled. "I've never seen such things."

"*Précisément.* I have. I do not know how they can be. I only know they are. When things exist we know that they are so, whether logic favors them or not."

"Then you think that this preposterous tale is true; that we can thaw this woman out and awaken her, after she's lain dead and tombed in ice for almost twenty years?"

"I did not say so——"

"Why, you did, too!"

"It was you, not I, who called her dead. Somatically she may be dead—clinically dead, in that her heart and lungs and brain have ceased to function, but that is not true death. You yourself have seen such cases revived, even when somatic death has lasted an appreciable time. She was not diseased when animation was suspended, and her body has been insulated from deteriorative changes. I think it possible the vital spark still slumbers dormant and can be revived to flame if we have care—and luck."

THE bathroom vigil lasted five full days and nights. There seemed a steel-like quality to the icy catafalque that defied summer heat and gently-drip-

ping water from the shower alike, as if the ice had stored up extra chill in the long years it lay locked in the frost-bound earth of Outer Mongolia, and several times I saw it freeze the water they dropped on it instead of yielding to the liquid's higher temperature. At last the casing melted off and they laid the stiff, marmoreal body in the tub, then ran a stream of water from the faucet. For ten hours this was cool, and the gelid body showed no signs of yielding to it. Time after time we felt the stone-hard arms and hands, the legs and feet that seemed for ever locked in algid *rigor mortis,* the little flower-like breasts that showed no promise of waking from their frigid unresponsiveness. Indeed, far from responding to the water's thermal action, the frozen body seemed to chill its bath, and we noticed little thread-like lines of ice take form upon the skin, standing stiffly out like oversized mold-spores and overlaying the white form with a coat of jewel-bright, quill-like pelage.

"Excellent, parfait, splendide; magnifique!" de Grandin nodded in delight as the ice-fur coat took form. "The chill is coming forth; we are progressing splendidly."

When the tiny icicles cleared away, they raised the water's temperature a little, gradually blending it from tepid to blood-warm, and fifteen hours of immersion in the warmer bath brought noticeable results. The skin became resilient to the touch, the flesh was firm but flexible, the folded hands relaxed and slipped down to the sides, slim ankles loosed their interlocking grip and the feet lay side by side.

"Behold them, if you please, my friend," de Grandin whispered tensely. "Her feet, see how they hold themselves!"

"Well?" I responded. "What——"

"Ah bah, has it been so long then since your student days that you do not remember the flaccidity of death? Think of the cadavers which you worked upon—were their feet like those ones yonder? By blue, they were not! They were prolapsed, they hung down on the ankles like extensions of the leg, for their flexor muscles had gone soft and inelastic. These feet stand out at obtuse angles to the legs."

"Well——"

"Précisément; tu parles, mon ami. It is very well, I think. It may not be a sign of life, but certainly it negatives the flaccidness of death."

Periodically they pressed the thorax and abdomen, feeling for the hardness of deep-seated frozen organs. At length, "I think we can proceed, my friends," de Grandin told us, and we lifted the limp body from the bath and dried it hurriedly with warm, soft towels. De Grandin drew the plugs of cotton from the nostrils and wiped the lips with ether to dissolve the seal of flexible collodion, and this done he and Aksakoff began to rub the skin with heated olive oil, kneading with firm gentleness, massaging downward toward the hands and feet, bending arms and legs, wrists, neck and ankles. Somehow, the process repulsed me. I had seen a similar technique used by embalmers when they broke up *rigor mortis,* and the certitude of death seemed emphasized by everything they did.

"Now, *Dei gratia,* we shall succeed!" the Frenchman whispered as he turned the body on its face and knelt over it, applying his hands to the costal margins, bearing down with all his might. There was a gentle, sighing sound, as of breath slowly exhaled, and Aksakoff went pale as death.

"She lives!" he whispered. "O Nikakova, *lubimui moï, radost moya——"*

I felt a sob of sympathy rise in my throat. Too often I had heard that vital simulation when air was forced between a corpse's lips by sudden pressure. No physician of experience, no morgue attendant, no embalmer can be fooled by that. . . .

"*Mordieu,* I think . . . I think——" de Grandin's soft, excited whisper sounded from the bed. He had leant back, releasing pressure on the corpse, and as he did so I was startled to observe a swelling of the lower thorax. Of course it could be nothing but mechanical reaction, the natural tendency of air to rush into an emptied space, I told myself, but . . .

He bent forward swiftly, pushing down upon the body with both hands, retained the pressure for a moment, then swung back again. Forward—back; forward—back, twenty times a minute by the swiftly-clicking second hand of his wrist watch he went through the movements of the Schaefer method of forced respiration, patiently, methodically, almost mechanically.

I shook my head despairingly. This hopeless labor, this unfounded optimism . . .

"Quick, quick, my friend, the suprarenalin!" he gasped. "Put fifteen minims in the syringe, and hurry, if you please. I can feel a little, so small stirring here, but we must perform a cardiocentesis!"

I hastened to the surgery to prepare the suprarenal extract, hopeless as I knew the task to be. No miracle of medicine could revive a woman dead and buried almost twenty years. I had not spent a lifetime as a doctor to no purpose; death was death, and this was death if I had ever seen it.

De Grandin poised the trocar's point against the pallid flesh beneath the swell of the left breast, and I saw the pale skin dimple, as though it winced instinctively. He thrust with swift, relentless pressure, and I marveled at the skill which guided pointed, hollow needle straight into the heart, yet missed the tangled maze of vein and artery.

Aksakoff was on his knees, hands clasped, eyes closed, prayers in strangled Russian gushing from his livid lips. De Grandin pressed the plunger home, shooting the astringent mixture deep into a heart which had not felt warm blood in half a generation.

A quick, spasmodic shudder shook the pallid body and I could have sworn I saw the lowered eyelids flutter.

The Frenchman gazed intently in the calm, immobile face a moment; then: "*Non?*" he whispered tensely. "*Pardieu,* I say you shall! I will it!"

Snatching up a length of sterile gauze he folded it across her lightly parted lips, drew a deep breath and laid his mouth to hers. I saw his temple-veins stand out as he drained his lungs of air, raised his head to gasp more breath, then bent and breathed again straight in the corpse's mouth. Tears stood in his eyes, his cheeks seemd losing every trace of color, he was becoming cyanotic. "Stop it, de Grandin!" I exclaimed. "It's no use, man, you're simply——"

"*Triomphe, victoire; succès!*" he gasped exultantly. "She breathes, she lives, my friends; we have vanquished twenty years of death. *Embrasse-moi!*" Before I realized what he was about he had thrown both arms around me and planted a resounding kiss on both cheeks, then served the Russian in like manner.

"Nikakova—Nikakova, *radost moya*—joy of life!" sobbed Aksakoff. The almost-golden lashes fluttered for an instant; then a pair of gray-green eyes looked vaguely toward the sobbing man, unfocussed, unperceiving, like the eyes of

new-born infants struggling with the mystery of light.

It was impossible, absurd and utterly preposterous. Such a thing could not have happened, but . . . there it was. In the upper chamber of my house I had seen a woman called back from the grave. Sealed in a tomb of ice for almost twenty years, this woman lived and breathed and looked at me!

PHYSICALLY she mended rapidly. We increased her diet of albumins, milk and brandy to light broth and well-cooked porridges in two days. She was able to take solid food within a week; but for all this she was but an infant magnified in size. Her eyes were utterly unfocussed, she seemed unable to do more than tell the difference of light and shade, when we spoke to her she gave no answer; the only sounds she made were little whimpering noises, not cries of pain or fear, but merely the mechanical responses of vocal cords reacting to the breath. Two nurses were installed and de Grandin scarcely left her side, but as the time drew out and it became increasingly apparent that the patient whom he nursed was nothing but a living organism without volition or intelligence, the lines about his eyes appeared more deeply etched each day.

A month went by without improvement; then one day he came fairly bouncing in to the study. "Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* come and see, but step softly, I implore you!" he commanded, clutching at my elbow and dragging me upstairs. At the bedroom door he paused and nodded, smiling broadly, like a showman who invites attention to a spectacle. Aksakoff knelt by the bed, and from the piled-up pillows Nikakova looked at him, but there was nothing infantile about her gaze.

"Nikakova, *radost moya*—joy of life!" he whispered, and:

"Serge, my love, my soul, my life!" came her murmured answer. Her pale hands lay like small white flowers in his clasp, and when he leant to her, her kisses flecked his cheeks, his brow, his eyelids like lightly fluttering butterflies.

"*Tiens,*" de Grandin murmured, "our Snow Queen has awakened, it seems; the frosts of burial have melted, and—come away, my friend; this is not for us to see!"

He tweaked my sleeve to urge me down the hall. The lovers' mouths were joined in a fierce, passionate embrace, and the little Frenchman turned away his eyes as though to look on them were profanation.

NIKAKOVA seemed intent on catching up the thread of interrupted life, and she and Serge with de Grandin spent long hours shopping, going to the theatre, visiting museums and art galleries or merely taking in the myriad scenes of city life. The semi-nudity of modern styles at first appalled her, but she soon revised her pre-war viewpoint and took to the unstockinged, corsetless existence of the day as if she had been born when Verdun and the Argonne were but memories, instead of in the reign of Nicholas the Last. When she finally had her flowing pale-gold hair cut short and permanently waved in little tight-laid poodle curls she might have passed as twin to any of a million of the current crop of high school seniors. She had an oddly incomplete mode of expression, almost devoid of pronouns and thickly strewn with participles, a shy but briar-sharp sense of humor, and an almost infinite capacity for sweets.

"No, recalling nothing," she assured us when we questioned her about her

long interment. "Drinking laudanum and saying good-bye to my Serge. Then sleep. Awaking finds Serge beside me. Nothing more—a sleep, a waking. Wondering could death—true death—be that way? To fall asleep and wake in heaven?"

As soon as Nikakova's strength returned they were to go to China where Serge's business needed personal direction, for now he had recovered his belovèd the matter of accumulating wealth had reassumed importance in his eyes. "We suffered poverty together; now we shall share the joy of riches, *radost moya,*" he declared.

DE GRANDIN had gone to the county medical society, where his fund of technical experience and his Rabelaisian wit made him an always welcome guest. Nikakova, Aksakoff and I were in the drawing-room, the curtains drawn against the howling storm outside, a light fire crackling on the hearth. She had been singing for us, sad, nostalgic songs of her orphaned homeland; now she sat at the piano, ivory hands flitting fitfully across the ivory keys as she improvised, pausing every now and then to nibble at a peppermint, then, with the spicy morsel still upon her tongue, to take a sip of coffee. I watched her musingly. Serge looked his adoration. She bore little semblance to the pale corpse in its ice-bound coffin, this gloriously happy girl who sat swaying to the rhythm of her music in the glow of the piano lamp. She wore a gown of striped silk that flashed from green to orange and from gold to crimson as she moved. It was negligible as to bodice, but very full and long of skirt. Brilliants glittered on her cross-strapped sandals, long pendants of white jade swayed from her ears.

In the trees outside, the wind rose to a wail, and a flock of gulls which flew storm-driven from the bay skirked like lost souls as they wheeled overhead. A mile away a Lackawanna locomotive hooted long and mournfully as it approached a crossing. Nikakova whirled up from her seat on the piano bench and crossed the room with the quick, feline stride of the trained dancer, her full skirt swirling round her feet, the firelight gleaming on her jewel-set sandals and on brightly lacquered toenails.

"Feeling devils," she announced as she dropped upon the hearth rug and crouched before the fire, chin resting in her palms, her fingers pressed against her temples. "Seeming to hear *zagovór*—'ow you call heem?—weetches' spell-charm? On nights like this the weetches and the wairwolves riding—dead men coming up from graves; ghosts from dead past flocking back——"

She straightened to her knees and took a match-box from the tabouret, bent a match stave till it formed an L turned upside down and drove the end of the long arm into the box top. Breaking off another stave to make it match the first in height, she stood it with its head against that of the upturned L, then pressed her cigarette against the touching sulfurous heads.

"Now watching!" she commanded. A sudden flare of flame ensued, and as the fire ran down the staves the upright match curled upward and seemed to dangle from the crossbar of the L. "What is?" she asked us almost gleefully.

"The man on the flying trapeze?" I ventured, but she shook her head until her ear-drops scintillated in the firelight.

"But no, great stupid one!" she chided. "Is execution—hanging. See, this one"—she pointed to the fire-curled match—"is criminal hanged on gibbet. Perhaps he was——"

"A Menshevik who suffered justly for his crimes against the People's Revolution?" Softly pronounced, the interruption came in slurring, almost hissing accents from the doorway, and we turned with one accord to see a man and woman standing on the threshold.

He was a lean, compactly put together man of something more than medium height, exceedingly ugly, with thin black eyebrows and yellowish-tinted skin. His head was absolutely hairless, yet his scalp had not that quality of glossiness we ordinarily associate with baldness. Rather, it seemed to have a suède-like dullness which threw no answering gleam back from the hall lamp under which he stood. His small, side-slanting eyes were black as obsidian and his pointed chin thrust out. His companion wore a blue raincoat, tight-buttoned to the throat, and above its collar showed her face, dead-white beneath short, jet-black hair brushed flat against her head. Her brows were straight and narrow, the eyes below them black as prunes; her lips were a thin, scarlet line. She looked hard and muscular, not masculine, but sexless as a hatchet.

I saw terror like cold flame wither my companions' faces as they looked up at the trespassers. Although they said no word I knew the chill and ominous foreknowledge of sure death was on them.

"See here," I snapped as I rose from my chair, "what d'ye mean by coming in this way——"

"Sit down, old man," the woman interrupted in a low, cold voice. "Keep still and we'll not hurt you——"

" 'Old man?' I choked. To have my house invaded in this way was injury, to be called an old man—that was added insult. "Get out!" I ordered sharply. "Get out of here, or——" The gleam of light upon the visitors' pistol barrels robbed my protest of authority.

"We have come to execute these traitors to the People's Cause," the man announced. "You have doubtless heard of us from them. I am Boris Proudhon, commissar of People's Justice. This is Matrona Rimsky——"

"And you will both oblige me greatly if you elevate your hands!" Standing framed in the front door, Jules de Grandin swung his automatic pistol in a threatening arc before him. He was smiling, but not pleasantly, and from the flush upon his ordinarily pale cheeks I knew he must have hurried through the rain.

There was corrosive, vitriolic hatred in the woman's voice as she wheeled toward him. "Bourgeois swine; capitalistic dog!" she spat, her pistol raised.

There was no flicker in de Grandin's smile as he shot her neatly through the forehead, nor did he change expression as he told the man, "It is a pity she should go to hell alone, *Monsieur.* You had better keep her company." His pistol snapped a second spiteful, whip-like crack, and Boris Proudhon stumbled forward on the body of his companion spy and fellow murderer.

"*Tiens,* I've followed them for hours," the Frenchman said as he came into the drawing-room, stepping daintily around the huddled bodies. "I saw them lurking in the shadows when I left the house, and knew they had no good intentions. Accordingly I circled back when I had reached the corner, and lay in wait to watch them. When they moved, so did I. When they so skilfully undid the front door lock all silently, I was at their elbows. When they announced intention to commit another murder—*eh bien,* it is not healthy to do things like that when Jules de Grandin is about."

"But it was scarcely eight o'clock when you went out; it's past eleven now. Surely you could have summoned the police,"

I protested. "Was it necessary that you shoot——"

"Not necessary, but desirable," he interrupted. "I know what's in your thought, Friend Trowbridge. Me, I can fairly see that Anglo-Saxon mind of yours at work. 'He shot a woman!' you accuse, and are most greatly shocked. *Pourquoi?* I have also shot the female of the leopard and the tiger when occasion called for it. I have set my heel upon the heads of female snakes. Had it been a rabid bitch I shot in time to save two lives you would have thought I did a noble service. Why, then, do you shudder with smug horror when I eliminate a blood-mad female woman? These two sent countless innocents to Siberia and death when they worked for the Tsarist government. As agents of the Soviets they fed their bloodlust by a hundred heartless killings. They murdered the great savant Pavlovitch in cold blood, they would have done the same for Nikakova and Serge had I not stopped them. *Tenez,* it was no vengeance that I did; it was an execution."

Aksakoff and Nikakova crossed the room and knelt before him, and in solemn turn took his right hand and raised it to their brows and lips. To me it seemed absurd, degrading, even, but they were Russians, and the things they did were ingrained as their thoughts. Also—I realized it with a start of something like surprize—Jules de Grandin was a Frenchman, emotional, mercurial, lovable and loving, but—a Frenchman. Therefore, he was logical as Fate. He lived by sentiment, but of sentimentality he had not a trace.

It was this realization which enabled me to stifle my instinctive feeling of repugnance as he calmly called police headquarters and informed them that the murderers of Doctor Pavlovitch were waiting at my house—"for the wagon of the morgue."

The Diary of Alonzo Typer

By WILLIAM LUMLEY

What terrible fate befell the intrepid investigator who dared to brave the dread occult evil that lurked beyond the iron door in that old mansion?

EDITOR'S NOTE: Alonzo Hasbrouck Typer of Kingston, New York, was last seen and recognized on April 17, 1908, around noon, at the Hotel Richmond in Batavia. He was the only survivor of an ancient Ulster County family, and was fifty-three years old at the time of his disappearance.

Mr. Typer was educated privately and at Columbia and Heidelberg universities. All his life was spent as a student, the field of his researches including many obscure and generally feared borderlands of human knowledge. His papers on

vampirism, ghouls, and poltergeist phenomena were privately printed after rejection by many publishers. He resigned from the Society for Psychical Research in 1920 after a series of peculiarly bitter controversies.

At various times Mr. Typer traveled extensively, sometimes dropping out of sight for long periods. He is known to have visited obscure spots in Nepal, India, Tibet, and Indo-China, and passed most of the year 1899 on mysterious Easter Island. The extensive search for Mr Typer after his disappearance yielded no results, and his estate was divided among distant cousins in New York City.

The diary herewith presented was allegedly found in the ruins of a large country house near Attica, N. Y., which had borne a curiously sinister reputation for generations before its collapse. The edifice was very old, antedating the general white settlement of the region, and had formed the home of a strange and secretive family named van der Heyl, which had migrated from Albany in 1746 under a curious cloud of witchcraft sus-

"To the meaning of that monster and of those hieroglyphs I had no clue."

picion. The structure probably dated from about 1760.

Of the history of the van der Heyls very little is known. They remained entirely aloof from their normal neighbors, employed negro servants brought directly from Africa and speaking little English, and educated their children privately and at European colleges. Those of them who went out into the world were soon lost to sight, though not before gaining evil repute for association with Black Mass groups and cults of even darker significance.

Around the dreaded house a straggling village arose, populated by Indians and later by renegades from the surrounding country, which bore the dubious name of Chorazin. Of the singular hereditary strains which afterward appeared in the mixed Chorazin villagers, several monographs have been written by ethnologists. Just behind the village, and in sight of the van der Heyl house, is a steep hill crowned with a peculiar ring of ancient standing stones which the Iroquois always regarded with fear and loathing. The origin and nature of the stones, whose date, according to archeological and climatological evidence, must be fabulously early, is a problem still unsolved.

From about 1795 onward, the legends of the incoming pioneers and later population have much to say about strange cries and chants proceeding at certain seasons from Chorazin and from the great house and hill of standing stones; though there is reason to suppose that the noises ceased about 1872, when the entire van der Heyl household—servants and all—suddenly and simultaneously disappeared.

Thenceforward the house was deserted; for other disastrous events—including three unexplained deaths, five disappearances, and four cases of sudden insanity—occurred when later owners and interested visitors attempted to stay in it. The house, village, and extensive rural areas on all sides reverted to the state and were auctioned off in the absence of discoverable van der Heyl heirs. Since about 1890 the owners (successively the late Charles A. Shields and his son Oscar S. Shields, of Buffalo) have left the entire property in a state of absolute neglect, and have warned all inquirers not to visit the region.

Of those known to have approached the house during the last forty years, most were occult students, police officers, newspaper men, and odd characters from abroad. Among the latter was a mysterious Eurasian, probably from Cochin-China, whose later appearance with blank mind and bizarre mutilations excited wide press notice in 1903.

Mr. Typer's diary—a book about 6 x 3½ inches in size, with tough paper and an oddly durable binding of thin sheet metal—was discovered in the possession of one of the decadent Chorazin villagers on November 16, 1935, by a state policeman sent to investigate the rumored collapse of the deserted van der Heyl mansion. The house had indeed fallen, obviously from sheer age and decrepitude, in the severe gale of November 12. Disintegration was peculiarly complete, and no thorough search of the ruins could be made for several weeks. John Eagle, the swarthy, simian-faced, Indian-like villager who had the diary, said that he found the book quite near the surface of the debris, in what must have been an upper front room.

Very little of the contents of the house could be identified, though an enormous and astonishingly solid brick vault in the cellar (whose ancient iron door had to be blasted open because of the strangely figured and perversely tenacious lock) remained intact and presented several

puzzling features. For one thing, the walls were covered with still undeciphered hieroglyphs roughly incised in the brickwork. Another peculiarity was a huge circular aperture in the rear of the vault, blocked by a cave-in evidently caused by the collapse of the house.

But strangest of all was the apparently *recent* deposit of some fetid, slimy, pitch-black substance on the flagstoned floor, extending in a yard-broad, irregular line with one end at the blocked circular aperture. Those who first opened the vault declared that the place smelled like the snake-house at a zoo.

The diary, which was apparently designed solely to cover an investigation of the dreaded van der Heyl house by the vanished Mr. Typer, has been proved by handwriting experts to be genuine. The script shows signs of increasing nervous strain as it progresses toward the end, in places becoming almost illegible. Chorazin villagers—whose stupidity and taciturnity baffle all students of the region and its secrets—admit no recollection of Mr. Typer as distinguished from other rash visitors to the dreaded house.

The text of the diary is here given verbatim and without comment. How to interpret it, and what, other than the writer's madness, to infer from it, the reader must decide for himself. Only the future can tell what its value may be in solving a generation-old mystery. It may be remarked that genealogists confirm Mr. Typer's belated memory in the matter of *Adriaen Sleght*.

The Diary

April 17, 1908

ARRIVED here about 6 p.m. Had to walk all the way from Attica in the teeth of an oncoming storm, for no one would rent me a horse or rig, and I can't run an automobile. This place is even worse than I had expected, and I dread what is coming, even though I long at the same time to learn the secret. All too soon will come the night—the old Walpurgis sabbat horror—and after that time in Wales I know what to look for. Whatever comes, I shall not flinch. Prodded by some unfathomable urge, I have given my whole life to the quest of unholy mysteries. I came here for nothing else, and will not quarrel with fate.

It was very dark when I got here, though the sun had by no means set. The storm-clouds were the densest I had ever seen, and I could not have found my way but for the lightning-flashes. The village is a hateful little backwater, and its few inhabitants no better than idiots. One of them saluted me in a queer way, as if he knew me. I could see very little of the landscape—just a small, swampy valley of strange brown weed-stalks and dead fungi surrounded by scraggly, evilly twisted trees with bare boughs. But behind the village is a dismal-looking hill on whose summit is a circle of great stones with another stone at the center. That, without question, is the vile primordial thing V——— told me about at the N——— estbat.

The great house lies in the midst of a park all overgrown with curious-looking briars. I could scarcely break through, and when I did the vast age and decrepitude of the building almost stopped me from entering. The place looked filthy and diseased, and I wondered how so leprous a bulk could hang together. It is wooden; and though its original lines are hidden by a bewildering tangle of wings added at various dates, I think it was first built in the square colonial fashion of New England. Probably that was easier to build than a Dutch stone house—and then, too, I recall that Dirck van der Heyl's wife was from Salem, a daugh-

ter of the unmentionable Abaddon Corey. There was a small pillared porch, and I got under it just as the storm burst. It was a fiendish tempest—black as midnight, with rain in sheets, thunder and lightning like the day of general dissolution, and a wind that actually clawed at me.

The door was unlocked, so I took out my electric torch and went inside. Dust was inches deep on floor and furniture, and the place smelled like a mold-caked tomb. There was a hall reaching all the way through, and a curving staircase on the right.

I plowed my way upstairs and selected this front room to camp out in. The whole place seems fully furnished, though most of the furniture is breaking down. This is written at 8 o'clock, after a cold meal from my traveling-case. After this the village people will bring me supplies; though they won't agree to come any closer than the ruins of the park gate until (as they say) later. I wish I could get rid of an unpleasant feeling of familiarity with this place.

Later.

I AM conscious of several presences in this house. One in particular is decidedly hostile toward me—a malevolent will which is seeking to break down my own and overcome me. I must not countenance this for an instant, but must use all my forces to resist it. It is appallingly evil, and definitely non-human. I think it must be allied to powers outside Earth—powers in the spaces behind time and beyond the universe. It towers like a colossus, bearing out what is said in the Aklo writings. There is such a feeling of vast size connected with it that I wonder these chambers can continue its bulk—and yet it has no visible bulk. Its age must be unutterably vast — shockingly, indescribably so.

April 18.

SLEPT very little last night. At 3 a. m. a strange, creeping wind began to pervade the whole region, ever rising until the house rocked as if in a typhoon. As I went down the staircase to see to the rattling front door the darkness took half-visible forms in my imagination. Just below the landing I was pushed violently from behind—by the wind, I suppose, though I could have sworn I saw the dissolving outlines of a gigantic black paw as I turned quickly about. I did not lose my footing, but safely finished the descent and shot the heavy bolt of the dangerously shaking door.

I had not meant to explore the house before dawn; yet now, unable to sleep again and fired with mixed terror and curiosity, I felt reluctant to postpone my search. With my powerful torch I plowed through the dust to the great south parlor, where I knew the portraits would be. There they were, just as V——— had said, and as I seemed to know from some obscurer source as well. Some were so blackened and dust-clouded that I could make little or nothing of them, but from those I could trace I recognized that they were indeed of the hateful line of the van der Heyls. Some of the paintings seemed to suggest faces I had known; but just what faces, I could not recall.

The outlines of that frightful hybrid Joris—spawned in 1773 by old Dirck's youngest daughter—were clearest of all, and I could trace the green eyes and the serpent look in his face. Every time I shut off the flashlight that face would seem to glow in the dark until I half fancied it shone with a faint, greenish light of its own. The more I looked, the more evil it seemed, and I turned away to

avoid hallucinations of changing expression.

But that to which I turned was even worse. The long, dour face, small, closely set eyes and swine-like features identified it at once, even though the artist had striven to make the snout look as human as possible. This was what V——— had whispered about. As I stared in horror, I thought the eyes took on a reddish glow, and for a moment the background seemed replaced by an alien and seemingly irrelevant scene—a lone, bleak moor beneath a dirty yellow sky, whereon grew a wretched-looking blackthorn bush. Fearing for my sanity, I rushed from that accursed gallery to the dust-cleared corner upstairs where I have my "camp."

Later

DECIDED to explore some of the labyrinthine wings of the house by daylight. I cannot get lost, for my footprints are distinct in the ankle-deep dust, and I can trace other identifying marks when necessary. It is curious how easily I learn the intricate windings of the corridors. Followed a long, outflung northerly "ell" to its extremity, and came to a locked door, which I forced. Beyond was a very small room quite crowded with furniture, and with the paneling badly worm-eaten. On the outer wall I spied a black space behind the rotting woodwork, and discovered a narrow secret passage leading downward to unknown inky depths. It was a steeply inclined chute or tunnel without steps or hand-holds, and I wondered what its use could have been.

Above the fireplace was a moldy painting, which I found on close inspection to be that of a young woman in the dress of the late Eighteenth Century. The face is of classic beauty, yet with the most fiendishly evil expression which I have ever known the human countenance to bear. Not merely callousness, greed, and cruelty, but some quality hideous beyond human comprehension seems to sit upon those finely carved features. And as I looked it seemed to me that the artist—or the slow processes of mold and decay—had imparted to that pallid complexion a sickly greenish cast, and the least suggestion of an almost imperceptibly scaly texture. Later I ascended to the attic, where I found several chests of strange books—many of utterly alien aspects in letters and in physical form alike. One contained variants of the Aklo formulæ which I had never known to exist. I have not yet examined the books on the dusty shelves downstairs.

April 19.

THERE are certainly unseen presences here, even though the dust bears no footprints but my own. Cut a path through the briars yesterday to the park gate where my supplies are left, but this morning I found it closed. Very odd, since the bushes are barely stirring with spring sap. Again I have that feeling of something at hand so colossal that the chambers can scarcely contain it. This time I feel that more than one of the presences is of such a size, and I know now that the third Aklo ritual—which I found in that book in the attic yesterday—would make such beings solid and visible. Whether I shall dare to try this materialization remains to be seen. The perils are great.

Last night I began to glimpse evanescent shadow-faces and forms in the dim corners of the halls and chambers—faces and forms so hideous and loathsome that I dare not describe them. They seem allied in substance to that titanic paw which tried to push me down the stairs night

before last, and must of course be phantoms of my disturbed imagination. What I am seeking would not be quite like these things. I have seen the paw again, sometimes alone and sometimes with its mate, but I have resolved to ignore all such phenomena.

Early this afternoon I explored the cellar for the first time, descending by a ladder found in a store-room, since the wooden steps had rotted away. The whole place is a mass of nitrous encrustations, with amorphous mounds marking the spots where various objects have disintegrated. At the farther end is a narrow passage which seems to extend under the northerly "ell" where I found the little locked room, and at the end of this is a heavy brick wall with a locked iron door. Apparently belonging to a vault of some sort, this wall and door bear evidences of Eighteenth Century workmanship and must be contemporary with the oldest additions to the house—clearly pre-Revolutionary. On the lock, which is obviously older than the rest of the ironwork, are engraved certain symbols which I cannot decipher.

V——— had not told me about this vault. It fills me with a greater disquiet than anything else I have seen, for every time I approach it I have an almost irresistible impulse to *listen* for something. Hitherto no untoward *sounds* have marked my stay in this malign place. As I left the cellar I wished devoutly that the steps were still there; for my progress up the ladder seemed maddeningly slow. I do not want to go down there again—and yet some evil genius urges me to try it *at night* if I would learn what is to be learned.

April 20

I HAVE sounded the depths of horror—only to be made aware of still lower depths. Last night the temptation was too strong, and in the black small hours I descended once more into that nitrous, hellish cellar with my flashlight, tiptoeing among the amorphous heaps to that terrible brick wall and locked door. I made no sound, and refrained from whispering any of the incantations I knew, but I listened with mad intentness.

At last I heard the sounds from beyond those barred plates of sheet iron, the menacing padding and muttering, as of gigantic night-things within. Then, too, there was a damnable slithering, as of a vast serpent or sea-beast dragging its monstrous folds over a paved floor. Nearly paralyzed with fright, I glanced at the huge rusty lock, and at the alien, cryptic hieroglyphs graven upon it. They were signs I could not recognize, and something in their vaguely Mongoloid technique hinted at a blasphemous and indescribable antiquity. At times I fancied I could see them glowing with a greenish light.

I turned to flee, but found that vision of the titan paws before me, the great talons seeming to swell and become more tangible as I gazed. Out of the cellar's evil blackness they stretched, with shadowy hints of scaly wrists beyond them, and with a waxing, malignant will guiding their horrible gropings. Then I heard from behind me—within that abominable vault—a fresh burst of muffled reverberations which seemed to echo from far horizons like distant thunder. Impelled by this greater fear, I advanced toward the shadowy paws with my flashlight and saw them vanish before the full force of the electric beam. Then up the ladder I raced, torch between my teeth, nor did I rest till I had regained my upstairs "camp".

What is to be my ultimate end, I dare not imagine. I came as a seeker, but now I know that something is seeking me. I

could not leave if I wished. This morning I tried to go to the gate for my supplies, but found the briars twisted tightly in my path. It was the same in every direction—behind and on all sides of the house. In places the brown, barbed vines had uncurled to astonishing heights, forming a steel-like hedge against my egress. The villagers are connected with all this. When I went indoors I found my supplies in the great front hall, though without any clue to how they came there. I am sorry now that I swept the dust away. I shall scatter some more and see what prints are left.

This afternoon I read some of the books in the great shadowy library at the rear of the ground floor, and formed certain suspicions which I cannot bear to mention. I had never seen the text of the Pnakotic Manuscripts or of the Eltdown Shards before, and would not have come here had I known what they contain. I believe it is too late now—for the awful Sabbat is only ten days away. It is for that night of horror that *they* are saving me.

April 21

I HAVE been studying the portraits again. Some have names attached, and I noticed one—of an evil-faced woman, painted some two centuries ago—which puzzled me. It bore the name of Trintje van der Heyl Sleght, and I have a distinct impression that I once met the name of Sleght before, in some significant connection. It was not horrible then, though it becomes so now. I must rack my brain for the clue.

The eyes of these pictures haunt me. Is it possible that some of them are emerging more distinctly from their shrouds of dust and decay and mold? The serpent-faced and swine-faced warlocks stare horribly at me from their blackened frames, and a score of other hybrid faces are beginning to peer out of shadowy backgrounds. There is a hideous look of family resemblance in them all, and that which is human is more horrible than that which is non-human. I wish they reminded me less of other faces—faces I have known in the past. They were an accursed line, and Cornelis of Leyden was the worst of them. It was *he* who broke down the barrier after his father had found that other key. I am sure that V——— knows only a fragment of the horrible truth, so that I am indeed unprepared and defenseless. What of the line before old Claes? What he did in 1591 could never have been done without generations of evil heritage, or some link with the outside. And what of the branches this monstrous line has sent forth? Are they scattered over the world, all awaiting their common heritage of horror? I must recall the place where I once so particularly noticed the name of Sleght.

I wish I could be sure that these pictures stay always in their frames. For several hours now I have been seeing momentary presences like the earlier paws and shadow-faces and forms, but closely duplicating some of the ancient portraits. Somehow I can never glimpse a presence and the portrait it resembles at the same time—the light is always wrong for one or the other, or else the presence and the portrait are in different rooms.

Perhaps, as I have hoped, the presences are mere figments of imagination, but I cannot be sure now. Some are female, and of the same hellish beauty as the picture in the little locked room. Some are like no portrait I have seen, yet make me feel that their painted features lurk unrecognized beneath the mold and soot of canvases I cannot decipher. A few, I desperately fear, have approached materialization in solid or semi-solid form—

and some have a dreadful and unexplained familiarity.

There is one woman who in fell loveliness excels all the rest. Her poisonous charms are like a honeyed flower growing on the brink of hell. When I look at her closely she vanishes, only to reappear later. Her face has a greenish cast, and now and then I fancy I can spy a suspicion of the squamous in its smooth texture. Who is she? Is she that being who must have dwelt in the little locked room a century and more ago?

My supplies were again left in the front hall—that, clearly, is to be the custom. I had sprinkled dust about to catch footprints, but this morning the whole hall was swept clean by some unknown agency.

April 22

THIS has been a day of horrible discovery. I explored the cobwebbed attic again, and found a carved, crumbling chest — plainly from Holland — full of blasphemous books and papers far older than any hitherto encountered here. There was a Greek *Necronomicon,* a Norman-French *Livre d'Eibon,* and a first edition of old Ludvig Prinn's *De Vermis Mysteriis.* But the old bound manuscript was the worst. It was in low Latin, and full of the strange, crabbed handwriting of Claes van der Heyl, being evidently the diary or notebook kept by him between 1560 and 1580. When I unfastened the blackened silver clasp and opened the yellowed leaves a colored drawing fluttered out—the likeness of a monstrous creature resembling nothing so much as a squid, beaked and tentacled, with great yellow eyes, and with certain abominable approximations to the human form in its contours.

I had never before seen so utterly loathsome and nightmarish a form. On the paws, feet, and head-tentacles were curious claws—reminding me of the colossal shadow-shapes which had groped so horribly in my path—while the entity as a whole sat upon a great throne-like pedestal inscribed with unknown hieroglyphs of vaguely Chinese cast. About both writing and image there hung an air of sinister evil so profound and pervasive that I could not think it the product of any one world or age. Rather must that monstrous shape be a focus for all the evil in unbounded space, throughout the eons past and to come—and those eldritch symbols be vile sentient ikons endowed with a morbid life of their own and ready to wrest themselves from the parchment for the reader's destruction. To the meaning of that monster and of those hieroglyphs I had no clue, but I knew that both had been traced with a hellish precision and for no namable purpose. As I studied the leering characters, their kinship to the symbols on that ominous lock in the cellar became more and more manifest. I left the picture in the attic, for never could sleep come to me with such a thing near by.

All the afternoon and evening I read in the manuscript book of old Claes van der Heyl; and what I read will cloud and make horrible whatever period of life lies ahead of me. The genesis of the world, and of previous worlds, unfolded itself before my eyes. I learned of the city Shamballah, built by the Lemurians fifty million years ago, yet inviolate still behind its walls of psychic force in the eastern desert. I learned of the Book of Dzyan, whose first six chapters antedate the Earth, and which was old when the lords of Venus came through space in their ships to civilize our planet. And I saw recorded in writing for the first time that name which others had spoken to me in whispers, and which I had known in a closer and more horrible way—the

shunned and dreaded name of *Yian-Ho.*

In several places I was held up by passages requiring a key. Eventually, from various allusions, I gathered that old Claes had not dared to embody all his knowledge in one book, but had left certain points for another. Neither volume can be wholly intelligible without its fellow; hence I have resolved to find the second one if it lies anywhere within this accursed house. Though plainly a prisoner, I have not lost my lifelong zeal for the unknown; and am determined to probe the cosmos as deeply as possible before doom comes.

April 23

SEARCHED all the morning for the second diary, and found it about noon in a desk in the little locked room. Like the first, it is in Claes van der Heyl's barbarous Latin, and it seems to consist of disjointed notes referring to various sections of the other. Glancing through the leaves, I spied at once the abhorred name of Yian-Ho—of Yian-Ho, that lost and hidden city wherein brood eon-old secrets, and of which dim memories older than the body lurk behind the minds of all men. It was repeated many times, and the text around it was strewn with crudely-drawn hieroglyphs plainly akin to those on the pedestal in that hellish drawing I had seen. Here, clearly, lay the key to that monstrous tentacled shape and its forbidden message. With this knowledge I ascended the creaking stairs to the attic of cobwebs and horror.

When I tried to open the attic door it stuck as never before. Several times it resisted every effort to open it, and when at last it gave way I had a distinct feeling that some colossal, unseen shape had suddenly released it—a shape that soared away on non-material but audibly beating wings. When I found the horrible drawing I felt that it was not precisely where I had left it. Applying the key in the other book, I soon saw that the latter was no instant guide to the secret. It was only a clue—a clue to a secret too black to be left lightly guarded. It would take hours — perhaps days — to extract the awful message.

Shall I live long enough to learn the secret? The shadowy black arms and paws haunt my vision more and more now, and seem even more titanic than at first. Nor am I ever long free from those vague, unhuman presences whose nebulous bulk seems too vast for the chambers to contain. And now and then the grotesque, evanescent faces and forms, and the mocking portrait-shapes, troop before me in bewildering confusion.

Truly, there are terrible primal arcana of Earth which had better be left unknown and unevoked; dread secrets which have nothing to do with man, and which man may learn only in exchange for peace and sanity; cryptic truths which make the knower evermore an alien among his kind, and cause him to walk alone on Earth. Likewise are there dread survivals of things older and more potent than man; things that have blasphemously straggled down through the eons to ages never meant for them; monstrous entities that have lain sleeping endlessly in incredible crypts and remote caverns, outside the laws of reason and causation, and ready to be waked by such blasphemers as shall know their dark forbidden signs and furtive passwords.

April 24

STUDIED the picture and the key all day in the attic. At sunset I heard strange sounds, of a sort not encountered before and seeming to come from far away. Listening, I realized that they must flow from that queer abrupt hill with the circle of

standing stones, which lies behind the village and some distance north of the house. I had heard that there was a path from the house leading up that hill to the primal cromlech, and had suspected that at certain seasons the van der Heyls had much occasion to use it; but the whole matter had hitherto lain latent in my consciousness. The present sounds consisted of a shrill piping intermingled with a peculiar and hideous sort of hissing or whistling, a bizarre, alien kind of music, like nothing which the annals of Earth describe. It was very faint, and soon faded, but the matter has set me thinking. It is toward the hill that the long, northerly "ell" with the secret chute, and the locked brick vault under it, extend. Can there be any connection which has so far eluded me?

April 25

I HAVE made a peculiar and disturbing discovery about the nature of my imprisonment. Drawn toward the hill by a sinister fascination, I found the briars giving way before me, *but in that direction only*. There is a ruined gate, and beneath the bushes the traces of an old path no doubt exist. The briars extend part-way up and all around the hill, though the summit with the standing stones bears only a curious growth of moss and stunted grass. I climbed the hill and spent several hours there, noticing a strange wind which seems always to sweep around the forbidding monoliths and which sometimes seems to whisper in an oddly articulate though darkly cryptic fashion.

These stones, both in color and in texture, resemble nothing I have seen elsewhere. They are neither brown nor gray, but rather of a dirty yellow merging into an evil green and having a suggestion of chameleon-like variability. Their texture is queerly like that of a scaled serpent, and is inexplicably nauseous to the touch —being as cold and clammy as the skin of a toad or other reptile. Near the central menhir is a singular stone-rimmed hollow which I cannot explain, but which may possibly form the entrance to a long-choked well or tunnel. When I sought to descend the hill at points away from the house I found the briars intercepting me as before, though the path toward the house was easily retraceable.

April 26

UP ON the hill again this evening, and found that windy whispering much more distinct. The almost angry humming came close to actual speech, of a vague, sibilant sort, and reminded me of the strange piping chant I had heard from afar. After sunset there came a curious flash of premature summer lightning on the northern horizon, followed almost at once by a queer detonation high in the fading sky. Something about this phenomenon disturbed me greatly, and I could not escape the impression that the noise ended in a kind of unhuman hissing speech which trailed off into guttural cosmic laughter. Is my mind tottering at last, or has my unwarranted curiosity evoked unheard-of horrors from the twilight spaces? The Sabbat is close at hand now. What will be the end?

April 27

AT LAST my dreams are to be realized! Whether or not my life or spirit or body will be claimed, I shall enter the gateway! Progress in deciphering those crucial hieroglyphs in the picture has been slow, but this afternoon I hit upon the final clue. By evening I knew their meaning—and that meaning can apply in only one way to the things I have encountered in this house.

There is beneath this house — sep-

ulchered I know not where—an ancient forgotten One Who will show me the gateway I would enter, and give me the lost signs and words I shall need. How long It has lain buried here, forgotten save by those who reared the stones on the hill, and by those who later sought out this place and built this house, I cannot conjecture. It was in search of this Thing, beyond question, that Hendrik van der Heyl came to New-Netherland in 1638. Men of this Earth know It not, save in the secret whispers of the fear-shaken few who have found or inherited the key. No human eye has even yet glimpsed It—unless, perhaps, the vanished wizards of this house delved farther than has been guessed.

With knowledge of the symbols came likewise a mastery of the Seven Lost Signs of Terror, and a tacit recognition of the hideous and unutterable Words of Fear. All that remains for me to accomplish is the Chant which will transfigure that Forgotten One Who is Guardian of the Ancient Gateway. I marvel much at the Chant. It is composed of strange and repellent gutturals and disturbing sibilants resembling no language I have ever encountered, even in the blackest chapters of the *Livre d'Eibon*. When I visited the hill at sunset I tried to read it aloud, but evoked in response only a vague, sinister rumbling on the far horizon, and a thin cloud of elemental dust that writhed and whirled like some evil living thing. Perhaps I do not pronounce the alien syllables correctly, or perhaps it is only on the Sabbat—that hellish Sabbat for which the Powers in this house are without question holding me—that the great Transfiguration can occur.

Had an odd spell of fright this morning. I thought for a moment that I recalled where I had seen that baffling name of Sleght before, and the prospect of realization filled me with unutterable horror.

April 28

TODAY dark ominous clouds have hovered intermittently over the circle on the hill. I have noticed such clouds several times before, but their contours and arrangements now hold a fresh significance. They are snake-like and fantastic, and curiosly like the evil shadow-shapes I have seen in the house. They float in a circle around the primal cromlech, revolving repeatedly as though endowed with a sinister life and purpose. I could swear that they give forth an angry murmuring. After some fifteen minutes they sail slowly away, ever to the eastward, like the units of a straggling battalion. Are they indeed those dread Ones whom Solomon knew of old—those giant black beings whose number is legion and whose tread doth shake the earth?

I have been rehearsing the Chant that will transfigure the Nameless Thing; yet strange fears assail me even when I utter the syllables under my breath. Piecing all evidence together, I have now discovered that the only way to It is through the locked cellar vault. That vault was built with a hellish purpose, and must cover the hidden burrow leading to the Immemorial Lair. What guardians live endlessly within, flourishing from century to century on an unknown nourishment, only the mad may conjecture. The warlocks of this house, who called them out of inner Earth, have known them only too well, as the shocking portraits and memories of the place reveal.

What troubles me most is the limited nature of the Chant. It evokes the Nameless One, yet provides no method for the control of That Which is evoked. There are, of course, the general signs and gestures, but whether they will prove effective toward such an One remains to be seen. Still, the rewards are great enough to justify any danger, and I could not

retreat if I would, since an unknown force plainly urges me on.

I have discovered one more obstacle. Since the locked cellar vault must be traversed, the key to that place must be found. The lock is far too strong for forcing. That the key is somewhere hereabouts cannot be doubted, but the time before the Sabbat is very short. I must search diligently and thoroughly. It will take courage to unlock that iron door, for what prisoned horrors may not lurk within?

Later

I HAVE been shunning the cellar for the past day or two, but late this afternoon I again descended to those forbidding precincts.

At first all was silent, but within five minutes the menacing padding and muttering began once more beyond the iron door. This time it was louder and more terrifying than on any previous occasion, and I likewise recognized the slithering that bespoke some monstrous sea-beast—now swifter and nervously intensified, as if the thing were striving to force its way through the portal to where I stood.

As the pacing grew louder, more restless, and more sinister, there began to pound through it those hellish and unidentifiable reverberations which I had heard on my second visit to the cellar—those muffled reverberations which seemed to echo from far horizons like distant thunder. Now, however, their volume was magnified an hundredfold, and their timbre freighted with new and terrifying implications. I can compare the sound to nothing more aptly than to the roar of some dread monster of the vanished saurian age, when primal horrors roamed the Earth, and Valusia's serpent-men laid the foundation-stones of evil magic. To such a roar—but swelled to deafening heights reached by no known organic throat—was this shocking sound akin. Dare I unlock the door and face the onslaught of what lies beyond?

April 29

THE key to the vault is found. I came upon it this noon in the little locked room — buried beneath rubbish in a drawer of the ancient desk, as if some belated effort to conceal it had been made. It was wrapped in a crumbling newspaper dated October 31, 1872; but there was an inner wrapping of dried skin—evidently the hide of some unknown reptile—which bore a Low Latin message in the same crabbed writing as that of the notebooks I found. As I had thought, the lock and key were vastly older than the vault. Old Claes van der Heyl had had them ready for something he or his descendants meant to do—and how much older than he they were I could not estimate. Deciphering the Latin message, I trembled in a fresh access of clutching terror and nameless awe.

"The secrets of the monstrous primal Ones," ran the crabbed text, "whose cryptic words relate the hidden things that were before man; the things no one of Earth should learn, lest peace be for ever forfeited; shall by me never suffer revelation. To Yian-Ho, that lost and forbidden city of countless eons whose place may not be told, I have been in the veritable flesh of this body, as none other among the living has been. Therein have I found, and thence have I borne away, that knowledge which I would gladly lose, though I may not. I have learnt to bridge a gap that should not be bridged, and must call out of the Earth That Which should not be waked nor called. And what is sent to follow me will not sleep till I or those after me have found and done what is to be found and done.

"That which I have awaked and borne away with me, I may not part with again. So is it written in the Book of Hidden Things. That which I have willed to be has twined its dreadful shape around me, and—if I live not to do the bidding—around those children born and unborn who shall come after me, until the bidding be done. Strange may be their joinings, and awful the aid they may summon till the end be reached. Into lands unknown and dim must the seeking go, and a house must be built for the outer guardians.

"This is the key to that lock which was given me in the dreadful, eon-old and forbidden city of Yian-Ho; the lock which I or mine must place upon the vestibule of That Which is to be found. And may the Lords of Yaddith succor me—or him—who must set that lock in place or turn the key thereof."

Such was the message — a message which, once I had read it, I seemed to have known before. Now, as I write these words, the key is before me. I gaze on it with mixed dread and longing, and cannot find words to describe its aspect. It is of the same unknown, subtly greenish frosted metal as the lock; a metal best compared to brass tarnished with verdigris. Its design is alien and fantastic, and the coffin-shaped end of the ponderous bulk leaves no doubt of the lock it was meant to fit. The handle roughly forms a strange, non-human image, whose exact outlines and identity cannot now be traced. Upon holding it for any length of time I seem to feel an alien, anomalous life in the cold metal—a quickening or pulsing too feeble for ordinary recognition.

Below the eidolon is graven a faint, eon-worn legend in those blasphemous, Chinese-like hieroglyphs I have come to know so well. I can make out only the beginning—the words: "My vengeance lurks . . ."—before the text fades to indistinctness. There is some fatality in this timely finding of the key—for tomorrow night comes the hellish Sabbat. But strangely enough, amidst all this hideous expectancy, that question of the Sleght name bothers me more and more. Why should I dread to find it linked with the van der Heyls?

Walpurgis-Eve—April 30

The time has come. I waked last night to see the key glowing with a lurid greenish radiance—that same morbid green which I have seen in the eyes and skin of certain portraits here, on the shocking lock and key, on the monstrous menhirs of the hill, and in a thousand other recesses of my consciousness. There were strident whispers in the air—sibilant whistlings like those of the wind around that dreadful cromlech. Something spoke to me out of the frore æther of space, and it said, "The hour falls." It is an omen, and I laugh at my own fears. Have I not the dread words and the Seven Lost Signs of Terror — the power coercive of any Dweller in the cosmos or in the unknown darkened spaces? I will no longer hesitate.

The heavens are very dark, as if a terrific storm were coming on—a storm even greater than that of the night when I reached here, nearly a fortnight ago. From the village, less than a mile away, I hear a queer and unwonted babbling. It is as I thought—these poor degraded idiots are within the secret, and keep the awful Sabbat on the hill.

Here in the house the shadows gather densely. In the darkness the sky before me almost glows with a greenish light of its own. I have not yet been to the cellar. It is better that I wait, lest the sound of that muttering and padding—those slitherings and muffled reverberations—un-

nerve me before I can unlock the fateful door.

Of what I shall encounter, and what I must do, I have only the most general idea. Shall I find my task in the vault itself, or must I burrow deeper into the nighted heart of our planet? There are things I do not yet understand—or at least, prefer not to understand—despite a dreadful, increasing, and inexplicable sense of bygone familiarity with this fearsome house. That chute, for instance, leading down from the little locked room. But I think I know why the wing with the vault extends toward the hill.

6 p. m.

LOOKING out the north windows, I can see a group of villagers on the hill. They seem unaware of the lowering sky, and are digging near the great central menhir. It occurs to me that they are working on that stone-rimmed hollow place which looks like a long-choked tunnel entrance. What is to come? How much of the olden Sabbat rites have these people retained? That key glows horribly—it is not imagination. Dare I use it as it must be used? Another matter has greatly disturbed me. Glancing nervously through a book in the library I came upon an ampler form of the name that has teased my memory so sorely: "Trintje, wife of Adriaen Sleght." The *Adriaen* leads me to the very brink of recollection.

Midnight

HORROR is unleashed, but I must not weaken. The storm has broken with pandemoniac fury, and lightning has struck the hill three times, yet the hybrid, malformed villagers are gathering within the cromlech. I can see them in the almost constant flashes. The great standing stones loom up shockingly, and have a dull green luminosity that reveals them even when the lightning is not there. The peals of the thunder are deafening, and every one seems to be horribly *answered* from some indeterminate direction. As I write, the creatures on the hill have begun to chant and howl and scream in a degraded, half-simian version of the ancient ritual. Rain pours down like a flood, yet they leap and emit sounds in a kind of diabolic ecstasy.

"Ia, Shub-Niggurath! The Goat with a Thousand Young!"

But the worst thing is within the house. Even at this height, I have begun to hear sounds from the cellar. *It is the padding and muttering and slithering and muffled reverberations within the vault. . . .*

Memories come and go. That name of *Adriaen Sleght* pounds oddly at my consciousness. Dirck van der Heyl's son-in-law . . . his child old Dirck's granddaughter and Abaddon Corey's great-granddaughter. . . .

Later

MERCIFUL God! *At last I know where I saw that name.* I know, and am transfixed with horror. All is lost. . . .

The key has begun to feel warm as my left hand nervously clutches it. At times that vague quickening or pulsing is so distinct that I can almost feel the living metal move. It came from Yian-Ho for a terrible purpose, and to me—who all too late know the thin stream of van der Heyl blood that trickles down through the Sleghts into my own lineage—has descended the hideous task of fulfilling that purpose. . . .

My courage and curiosity wane. I know the horror that lies beyond that iron door. What if Claes van der Heyl was my ancestor—need I expiate his nameless sin? *I will not—I swear I will not! . . .* (the writing here grows indistinct) . . . too late—cannot help self—black paws materialize—am dragged away toward the cellar. . . .

"Reid was suddenly aware of his own smallness."

The Goddess Awakes

By CLIFFORD BALL

A striking weird novelette about a roving soldier of fortune, a sinister, evil stone idol in the form of a black panther, and a race of women warriors

TWILIGHT faded rapidly into night as the two fugitives gained the ragged summit of the mountain ridge. They paused there for a moment's rest as the full moon swept over the black crags and illuminated the valley below. Great clefts and crevices, shadowed by broken ground and projecting boulders, presented a treacherous path for night travelers; it was difficult to deter-

mine solid objects from the unsubstantial in the misleading network of black and silver. The two halted to gaze at the apparent desolation of empty pits and jagged peaks, then at each other and, finally, at the plain behind them, over which they had so recently painfully struggled.

"If this be refuge," said Rald, "then hell at least would be brighter!"

"Refuge, like gold, is where you find it," replied the weary Thwaine, shifting his wiry frame to rest a blood-stained thigh on a convenient boulder. "Perhaps the valley is a trifle forbidding, but when I recall the thirsty steel of those devils back there on the battlefield I welcome these concealing cliffs with a thankful heart."

"Always the orator!" grunted Rald. "Make a propitiating address to the demons, who no doubt await us below, before we descend to them—will you?"

With the aid of his teeth and a begrimed right hand Rald succeeded in replacing a blood-stained bandage about his left wrist.

Although wounded and bleeding, the two comrades realized they had been extraordinarily lucky; for all but a few scattered fragments of the Livian army lay stark in death, food for the buzzards and the crawling things of the desert. The fugitives had fought desperately, but Hagar's hosts had pierced and smashed their last crimson line; the banners had fallen, and Rald saw his king transfixed with the same spear that had just emerged from the vitals of his prince. The Livians were crushed beyond hope of recovery. Thwaine, ever alert, read the decision in his companion's eyes and joined him in flight over the bloody sands where buzzards already hovered above torn and mangled forms that had been men; they both knew that unless they placed a comfortable distance between themselves and their pursuers the swords of the soldiers whose task it was to eliminate all survivors would wipe out their lives. These same lives they had dedicated for a paltry sum (only a portion of which had been received) to Livia in her war against Hagar.

"So ends Livia!" commented Thwaine. "Why do we always pick the losing side to fight on? Once in a while we should be victors!"

"Mercenary's fortune! I am inclined to return to thievery!" exclaimed Rald.

"What difference? Stealing for a king or for yourself? At least, when you claim the spoils of war you can boast of them without fearing a rope or the executioner's blade! Or," asked Thwaine, slyly, "are your inclinations leading you back to Forthe and a certain lady?"

"Faith!" swore the ex-chief. "What spoils have we beyond our sores?" He ignored the last remark completely. "Let's get below somewhere; the night-winds are beginning to chill."

Both men were in rags. The generals bought hired mercenaries a breechclout, sword, plenty of weak wine—and little else. These necessities were about all expected or demanded. Weary bones and blood-caked wounds were habitual to them, a state to be accepted as natural; so except for an occasionally deeper breath or muttered imprecation they disregarded their condition and proceeded to descend the twisting trail of the mountain pass.

RALD led the way, his huge form, so well sheathed in its envelope of sinewy muscles, completely shadowing the smaller and wiry body of his boon companion. In spite, however, of the difference in their sizes and the contrast of Rald's gray eyes, long limbs and light skin to his fellow mercenary's dark, ferret-like, suspicious eyes, small stature and swarthy complexion, the twain were a

dangerous combination and held reputations of note in many widely scattered countries. Their swords were for sale in war against any land but that of Forthe, their native kingdom. Perhaps Rald's vagabond allegiance was a trifle stronger than Thwaine's, as the former owed homage not only to his kingdom but also to a certain lady of the realm, a member of the royal family.

"Any food I can get must be taken as charity," announced the slighter warrior. "That dancing-girl got every last coin of mine two nights ago."

"A lot of use they'll be to her!" laughed Rand. "They were not of gold. Livia is no more, and her currency is not worth the stupid heads imprinted on it!"

"By the Seven, it's so! What a joke on her!"

Sliding, stumbling, limping in pain and weariness over rough boulders and treacherous shale, the two refugees came at last to where the canyon narrowed into a twisting defile barely wide enough to permit them to walk side by side. A thin trickle of water flowed now on one side of their path, then on the other; from somewhere ahead came the dull roar of an unseen waterfall. As they halted to slake their raging thirsts, the moon, now high overhead, flooded the rocky passage with such brilliance that twin shadows flickered and skipped above the reflecting waterflow.

"Wish I was back in Zan's wine-shop," grumbled Thwaine, "with stout ale and a cozy wench! This is a place for ghosts and demons!"

Rald, who constantly sought to contradict his comrade's moods, being gloomy when Thwaine was boisterous and merry when he was despondent, laughed cheerfully. Echoes shattered the far-flung vibrations in a hundred rocky corners and the smaller man grasped his sword-hilt in startled apprehension as the distorted notes conjured up an invisible and surrounding host. But Rald was amused.

"You 'welcomed these concealing cliffs' a short while back," he reminded. "Show me a fleshy demon, if you can, and I'll carve a steak or two for the appetites gnawing our stomachs! I like your phantoms no better than any other man, but, since I forsook thievery for the so-called glory of warfare, it's the ghosts of hunger that plague me most."

"'Always the orator!'" mimicked Thwaine in his turn.

Suddenly, swiftly serious, Rald snatched his companion's arm, shoved him headlong into the shadow of a protecting boulder and leaped to concealment behind an adjoining projection.

"Look!"

Several yards ahead a slight elevation led to a low wall or mound of rock. Above and behind this natural rampart, boldly outlined in moonlight, was the torso of a human being. From their lower position the fugitives observed the silent menace wearing fighting-girdle and breastplates, with shoulder-length hair bound by a metal clasp behind the ears to keep stray locks from interfering with eyesight at perhaps a crucial moment, and the easily held and naked sword. The newcomer stood alone and bore a confident air, suggesting that other allies were near at hand. The mercenaries saw that, while possibly a foe, here was no minion of Hagar's; for the well-known scarlet emblem of the conquering king was absent from the chest. It was obvious, too, their presence had been discovered already, perhaps detected after Rald's betraying merriment.

Thwaine, with his quick perception, noticed certain distinctive curves and swore: "By the Seven, a woman in fighting-mail!"

"Hold!" came the regulation challenge. Indubitably, it *was* a woman, but her tone

was stern and war-like. "Throw down your arms and advance!"

Astonished, Thwaine whispered hastily: "Maybe a demon in woman's form . . . succubus——"

"I'll talk!" warned Rald. "Slip along the shadows there and strike the steel from her hand. Quick! There may be more, and we can use a hostage." Then aloud: "Ho, woman, why do you accost peaceful travelers with such inhospitable manners? We seek only rest and comfort, we but——"

Thwaine had taken but two cautious steps forward when a noose slithered from above and wound itself about his crouched form. Choking, he staggered backward, clawing at his throat. With a sweep of his sword Rald severed the strangling cord. Glancing upward, he had a brief glimpse of a well-rounded female figure poised on the rocks above and clad, like their accoster, in burnished mail; in uplifted hands she held a jagged stone. For the space of two heart-beats he saw her; then the boulder struck the base of his neck with stunning force and consciousness left his body before it touched the ground.

RALD awoke in semi-darkness. Bit by bit, very slowly, he became aware of things about him. Somewhere water was falling—whether stream or rainfall he did not know or care. Above he saw a seamed stone ceiling and he was conscious the object supporting his reclining form was some kind of a couch. The room, he could tell by the ceiling, was small, and he observed no windows within the restricted limits of his view. Gentle hands—female, it seemed—were engaged in applying a soothing massage to his various abrasions. There was a heavy, dull ache in his head and his neck was too stiff to turn. Vaguely he thought of Thwaine, but his debilitated limbs refused to obey the dim commands he sought to impart to an exhausted brain; he lay still and drifted back into a dream-racked sleep wherein he dwelt once more in beloved Forthe to carouse in the native taverns and drink the red wines of Ygoth's slopes. Throughout his dream the memory of a lady stirred his pulse's strength and a slight smile rested on the hitherto pain-racked lips.

When he awoke again it was night, or at least he so surmised after seeing blank darkness beyond and through the iron network of a doorway and a sputtering torch thrust into a hanging bracket on the wall. From a tousled couch on the opposite side of the prison cell his fellow mercenary regarded him gravely.

One of Thwaine's wrists was encircled by a ringlet of steel attached to an accompanying chain which was, in turn, secured to another ring imbedded in the wall. An ankle was fastened likewise to a circlet in the floor; so the prisoner could move into restricted positions without taking leave of his bed. When Rald attempted to swing himself erect he discovered that he too was confined in a similar fashion.

"Well," he demanded of the solemn Thwaine, "who has us, and why are we chained like captured white apes from Sorjoon?"

"Succubi, I think! And the reason must be because we are men!"

"What do they welcome here—apes?"

"Listen. For two days and nights I've lain——"

"Two—days and nights?"

"You've been unconscious that long. The woman who smote you with the rock almost made a thorough job of it. But, it seems, it was intended that we be taken as captives and not as corpses. The woman we first saw, the one commanding the party, told me so; nothing else, though—for a female she has a very re-

strained tongue! The woman who comes thrice a day to minister to your wounds and the other who guards the corridor without—and is probably listening to our conversation——"

"Women! Women!" exclaimed Rald, clutching an aching skull. "Why all these women? Isn't it enough that I, who fought and conquered the strongest adversaries Hagar's gladiator pits could furnish, should be knocked cold by a woman with a pebble, without waking up to hear you bellowing of more females, over and over, like a chattering monkey? Who is king or chief of this place? Name me the lord and master of this superfluity of women and we'll sell him our swords—or stick them through him!"

"We have no swords," reminded Thwaine, quietly. Always, one of the two remained exasperatingly serene while the other indulged in emotional tantrums. Thwaine could excel in the former role. "And as far as I can determine, the ruler or master here is Cene—a woman."

"Faith!" Rald rattled his chains in disgust. Then another thought caused his expression to change to more cheerful lines. "A country without men, eh? What opportunities, comrade! We won't stay imprisoned for long!"

"Don't be misled. I was also inspired with the same idea. There was a very comely wench who served my food as you lay unconscious. When I attempted an embrace, she——" Wordlessly, he turned his face and exposed three parallel and jagged wounds below an ear. "Like a tiger! And entirely without feelings, for she came afterward and shaved both of us as unconcerned as if we had been wooden."

Rald felt of his smooth cheeks. "I wish I had awaked then!"

"Your jugular was safer as you slept!"

THERE was the sound of a scraping sandal from the darkness of the passage without, and a pointed, elfin face appeared and surveyed the prison through one of the iron-framed apertures. The features were those of a girl in her teens, fresh with vitality and youth, but she wore a soldier's livery and the accompanying fighting circlet bound her dark curls. Her mien was serious and there was a sense of responsibility in her carriage.

"You are feeling better, man?" she inquired of Rald.

"I am *not*, my goddess!"

Humor was wasted on the girl-soldier. Her eyes became sympathetic.

"I had better, perhaps, report to my captain?"

"You may inform your captain our condition would improve remarkably—yes, instantaneously—if we were given back our swords!"

The guard's face expressed a mixture of emotions that rapidly became involved as her sense of duty struggled with her awe of this giant with such commanding tones. She took a backward step and observed the strength of the iron bars. They had not seemed so great a barrier between her and these powerful creatures when her head was between them.

"You are—*men!* You have not the right to bear arms!"

Thwaine and Rald stared at each other in amazement.

"My dear lady!" said Thwaine, finally, in his most suave manner. "We have earned the right to bear arms——"

"I am not a lady!"

"By Nargarth's devils!" swore Rald, choking.

"I am a soldier of the Guards!"

"Of course," agreed Thwaine, soothingly. The corner of his mouth, the side which could not be observed by their captor, snarled ferociously at Rald, and the ex-thief subsided. "It is obvious. But

this country of yours is strange to us and we do not fully understand your customs; so pray forgive us our questions and our apparent lack of intelligence. We mean no offense. Could you tell us *why* we are prisoners and what crime we may have unknowingly committed?"

"Why—*you are men!*"

Rald, the irrepressible, roared his mirth. The girl, believing that in some way these barbarians were making sport of her, grew white with anger.

"Faith! It's the first time a woman judge ever condemned me for that!" chuckled the mercenary, his wounds forgotten and his chains rattling a vigorous accompaniment. "Wait until I tell *this* in the taverns!"

"You may never live to tell it if you are not quiet!" growled Thwaine savagely as he saw that his oily persuasion had been a straw cast to the wind.

"It is against orders to converse with prisoners," stated their guard between set teeth. Her voice had become the flat monotone so frequently employed by officers on the drilling-grounds.

"But wait, please!" begged Thwaine. "Whose orders?"

The girl hesitated, half turned to depart, and paused to regard them thoughtfully. These strange creatures, despite their attitudes toward her, *were* fascinating, she concluded. And the smaller one spoke respectfully even if the brutish captive did act like a forest beast.

She surrendered a technical point.

"Throal's orders."

"And who is Throal?"

"Don't you know?" Her voice expressed extreme astonishment. "Why, everyone knows Throal!" Her eyes bespoke her summation of their intelligence. Of course, they were only *men!* "Throal is God, the Ancient One, and he and his daughter, Hess, rule all the world!"

Thwaine stared at Rald, "Do you know of this god who appears to have become interested in us?"

"No! I have never fought for him or stolen for him, but if his sacred orders were to shackle me in this underground cage, then I will admit that we must be acquainted."

"You deride Throal?" gasped the horrified guard.

"Better than that!" shouted Rald, "We'll dethrone him!"

Wide-eyed, amazed at the boldness of the barbarians, the girl fled to the post she had abandoned in the corridor.

"You loud-mouthed fool!" cursed Thwaine. "Why did you not allow me to find out something about this place?"

"You haven't made much progress during the two days I lay unconscious!"

The ex-thief began to rub his arm-chains against an edge of the iron cot in an effort to test their strength.

"Ho! Guard! Guard!" shouted Thwaine.

Almost instantly the elfin face reappeared in the doorway, registering both alarm and curiosity.

"Inform your captain, please," requested the smaller man calmly, "that my fellow prisoner is attempting to burst his chains and that I do not wish to anger Throal by permitting him to succeed in his outrageous endeavor—even by remaining silent!"

FROZEN in limb and face, Rald gazed at his comrade while their guard ran for aid. Three nerve-shattering notes sounded from a set of alarm cymbals stationed somewhere outside in the passage, and soon a rapid patter of footwear announced the approach of reinforcements. Still the ex-thief stared his amazement.

Thwaine whispered softly: "Pretend to be angered at me! We will be taken to this god or his representative and have a chance to find a way out of these dun-

geons—perhaps! At least they will have to remove these chains to move us. Understand?"

As Rald nodded his appreciation of his comrade's strategy, the shuffling of sandals, mingled with the clinking of light mail and a murmur of feminine voices, drew near. A stalwart brunette commanded an abrupt halt in front of their cell. Behind her the interested prisoners saw a line consisting of six similarly attired females all armed in the full panoply of the battlefield.

"Why the alarm, Ating?" queried the leader of their summoner.

"I thought, my captain, it was best. The little one, called Thwaine, warned me that the great one, Rald, was bursting his chains. He said he did not wish to witness such a defiance of Throal's commands!"

The captain's eyes swung to Thwaine, who bowed as abjectly as his chains would permit. "Commendable! I shall recommend him to Cene; perhaps he may be spared to join the other men in the slave-pits. Meanwhile, I have received orders to escort both prisoners to an audience with the queen as soon as the larger one regained consciousness. Ating, unlock the cell!"

Ating was not gifted with the stout caliber possessed by the majority of the soldiers, for her hands shook as she detached the prison's keys from her belt and she obviously experienced difficulty both in unlocking the door and loosening the inmate's chains. So as to discourage any idea of possible escape, the leg-cuff was left fastened and its mate, which had been attached to a ring in the wall, was coupled onto the other ankle. Rald, accustomed to lengthy strides, became indignant, but three sword-points hovering about his breast and throat subdued him to coherency.

"Thwaine, my friend," he said, "it may be that these are only women; by their curves and voices it would seem so, but I think this is an evil place and I detect an unearthly odor!"

"Now who speaks of demons?"

"The prisoners will be quiet!" ordered the captain of the Guards, not even blushing when Rald winked at her.

With two women before them and the rest, including Ating, their former guard, bringing up the rear and warily fingering drawn weapons, the two mercenaries were led out into the corridor.

To their right stretched a low-roofed passage lit at frequent intervals by the ironwood torches that burned for days, the material of which could be found in nearly every land and the usefulness of its lighting facilities being virtually indispensable to many peoples. The flickering flames cast a multitude of shadows, now before and now behind, as the captives and their guards passed the evenly spaced niches in which they were suspended. Rald stumbled occasionally as his long limbs sought to increase the distance between his encumbering shackles, and swore when he staggered; but Thwaine, whose shorter legs did not hinder him so much, strode confidently, wearing a thoughtful air and darting a glance now and then to where Ating formed part of the rear guard.

Rald noted that the corridor sloped gradually upward, and he breathed a sigh; he would be glad to see the sky and feel fresh air again. There was an abrupt twist in the passage; as they rounded it the ex-thief, straining his eyes through the mixture of shadows and light to see what lay before him, perceived a figure advancing along the corridor. As the figure drew near he gasped in amazement. Indubitably, it was a man, the first they had seen. But what a man! Naked except for a short cloth suspended about his loins, with every rib prominent through

his emaciated flesh, with uncombed hair and huge, staring, vacant eyes, the creature was only a living caricature of a man. His eyeballs were filmed like those of one who walked in his sleep, and his mouth was twisted as meaninglessly as an imbecile's. He cringed against the rocky wall to avoid the party as they passed. None of the female soldiers paid the least attention to him; they passed as if his humble figure was invisible to them, and turned another corner. Rald and Thwaine gazed at each other with dawning comprehension.

"If they are all like *that*——" said Rald.

"I begin to see!" exclaimed his comrade.

"Silence!" intoned the captain of the Guards, emphasizing her command by prodding Rald in the posterior with her sword. The captive grunted and swore—beneath his breath.

AT LENGTH they emerged from underground into what at first appeared to be a great chamber cut from the solid rock but which might have been the crater of an ancient, long extinct volcano, as Rald believed it to be after he had gazed upward and seen the midday sun glaring fiercely above the immense hollow in the mountain. Sunlight was reflected from a million crystals embedded in the quartz composing the great walls, and the eyes of all were momentarily blinded until their optic nerves had readjusted themselves to the transition. At the point where the group halted, after emerging from the lower darkness, the wall of rock descended perpendicularly for a sheer thirty feet to the level sands of the crater's bottom, an area some hundred and fifty feet in diameter. Stout ropes had been wound about pillars, seemingly carven from living rock, to half the height of an average body, apparently as a safeguard for any incautious persons who might wander too close to the edge.

"Look!" exclaimed Thwaine. "There are seats cut into the stone walls all around this bowl! Do you know what this is? It's an amphitheater, a gladiator pit! Rald, my friend, we are gladiators again!"

"And I presume we will fight—women?"

"Do they not appear capable? There's *something* out there on the sands—there in the center of the pit. I can't make out just what it is—this brazen sunlight blinds me!"

Rald peered with no greater success. "An image or something of the kind, I think."

"Quiet!" admonished the captain as she again pressed a painful point against the larger mercenary's rear.

Some signal not perceived by the captives was evidently received, for suddenly the guard came to life again and the helpless two were prodded forward along a pathway that encircled the lip of the pit. After proceeding probably a quarter of the way around its circumference they arrived at a point where the rock had been cut away from the wall, an area comprising perhaps thirty square feet. Against the farther end of this break in the mountain's otherwise perfect oval stood an ornate, bejeweled throne and on it sat a woman garbed in glittering mail. Her poise was regal.

"Cene! The queen!" growled Thwaine. "Be diplomatic!"

"How can I be diplomatic while this cursed female is gouging me in the rear with a sword?" roared Rald in ear-shattering tones.

The ex-thief was rapidly reaching a state wherein he could not control himself as he recalled his capture and imprisonment, and observed the indignity of his present position. All of these occurrences

had served as pointed tools that delved beneath his skin to the inner nerves. Now he became berserk. Disregarding the swords at his back he dived onto the shoulders of one of the unsuspecting guards before him and in an instant wrenched her sword from her hand. Half falling because of the clumsiness of the chains about his ankles, he managed nevertheless to gain the rocky wall. Once there, he turned and fixed all enemies with a tigerish, defiant eye as he assumed a protective crouch.

"Women or not, I'll kill the first one to move!"

"Rald!" exclaimed Thwaine, his voice low but desperate.

The smaller captive had not moved an inch when Rald made his daring bid for freedom; amazed at this lack of co-operation, the rebellious one noted that neither had the women—not even the one whose sword he had confiscated. Then his eyes swung, before Thwaine's pleading guidance, to the opposite wall of the blind gulch, and he saw the reason. Ten female warriors stood along the cliff holding poised spears, all of which were pointed at him as they awaited the order to throw. Escape was impossible. Should he take but one step, he would be impaled by a series of shafts—if these women's ability to throw straight upheld the confident bearing implied by their postures.

"Hold!" ordered the figure on the throne. "Do not kill him—now."

"You are—Queen Cene?" asked Rald.

GRAVELY, the woman nodded her head in assent. Even in this tense moment the mercenary observed and inwardly complimented her attractiveness—the raven-black curls, the long-lashed eyes, the curves of cheek and chin and crimson lips. Her corset of mail failed to conceal her femininity; its shining surface merely enhanced the smoothness and transparency of the skin on the throat and face. There was an air of regality about her person, some trick of mannerism or posture that plainly made evident her right to sit upon the throne. She had inherited royal blood along with the invisible purple mantle bestowed by the Seven Gods on men or women who were rulers among their kind, the mantle so often stained crimson by the blood of both fools and heroes.

"I am Cene," she said, "Queen of Ceipe and Priestess of the Temple of Bast."

"Bast!" cried Thwaine with horror in his voice.

Rald made no sound, but his eyes widened as he studied the queen's face. Echoes of gossip garnered from the streets and taverns of Ygoth flooded his brain—tales told above the flowing of the wine; of a lost, virtually inaccessible kingdom in the mountains beyond the Livian plains where women were of warrior stock. It was said that the people there bowed to a dreadful goddess, called Bubaste, the same that ruled in a far-off land known to few, in a strange country by a sluggish river named the Nile. A cat-goddess! Bubaste, or Bast, as this goddess was sometimes known, was not as harmless as many of the other gods men worshipped, according to the tales; for gruesome stories abounded of half-devoured bodies left by her after frequent repasts, and how shrieking, insane, cruelly clawed men had staggered out of the desert at night, babbling deliriously, before they died, of a great black panther. Always their stories were the same. Gradually men began to believe, knowing such repetition must be based on fact. The huge cat they described had spoken to them with a human voice, so they declared, and had addressed them by name. Some of these men had been criminals with prices on their heads, some escaping slaves, and others honest

travelers of the wastelands. Many of them owned birth-names unknown to their immediate companions, but the monster cat never failed in selecting their rightful and given appellation as it stalked them down. Once a man dying of inch-wide furrows clawed the length of his spine swore the giant beast had mocked him as he fled, reminding him that it had devoured his father many years before. The truth that Bubaste, or Bast, was a living goddess capable of wanton death and destruction had long been impressed upon the minds of the dwellers of the neighboring kingdoms of Forthe, Livia and Ygoth, also among vagabond desert tribes whose members had been stricken by the living scourge; and throughout the land there arose a fear that swept like a tidal wave even to the far-away mountains of Fuvia. A living, slaying goddess walked the earth, and the unfortunates whose ill luck it was to encounter her died.

The mercenary remembered all he had heard of this foreign goddess in the space of a second, but being essentially human and possessed with natural impulses, Rald eyed the supple form of the woman who claimed the throne of Ceipe and reflected on the inconsistency of idols, immortals and goddesses. Not being devout, he seldom concerned himself with the future and remained happily content with the present.

"By the Seven!" he swore. "You're no panther — unless my eyes are bewitched!"

A rosy tide suffused Queen Cene's cheeks. Whether its source was embarrassment or anger the ex-thief could not decide; for at that moment his attention was drawn to a new figure which had appeared in the entrance to the fissure in the mountain wall. There was a sudden hush among the warriors; a respectful silence fell like a fog-laden cloud, and Cene, half risen from her throne because of Rald's threatening demeanor, shrank back with a low gasp of breath that might have expressed dismay. A tall and extremely thin man, clad in the thick folds of a long, black robe which extended from neck to heel, stood in the gap's entrance. His head was absolutely bare of any hirsute growth; combined with his deep-set and gleaming eyes it resembled the bald skull of a vulture of the desert wastes. His features themselves suggested the likeness; for they were thin, bony, and sharply pointed at the chin and nostrils. He was clad as simply as a priest; apparently the flowing robe was his only garment and the thick staff he leaned upon his only ornament. Nor did he carry a visible weapon, which was indeed strange for a grown man in the lands wherein even small children carried protective daggers in their belts.

It was evident to Rald that here was a personage to respect, for he saw the warrior-women flinch when they beheld him, and the tremulous lines of fear and repulsion could be detected on the countenances of many. Ating, their former guard, stifled an outcry only by placing her own hand over her mouth.

THE QUEEN was the first of all the women to regain her poise. In an even tone she said: "You have slept long, O Throal!"

"Yes, my queen," answered the newcomer. His voice was a harsh croak, and again Rald thought of vultures. "And well, too. In my dreams many things presented themselves to me. I sometimes travel afar in my sleep, as you know. There came to me recently a vision of two strangers, mercenaries of a lost cause. I awoke. Behold—they are here!"

"We captured them beyond the waterfall, O Throal. I do not believe they intended harm or were aware of crossing

our boundaries; obviously, they were lost. I have already reprimanded the captain who brought them here."

"You were mistaken, but can be forgiven, of course; for mistakes are the right of royalty."

Rald could see that the queen was uneasy and that something unknown to him was preying on her mind. He had closely observed every mannerism and inflection of voice between these two that appeared to direct the decisions of the kingdom of Ceipe. Now he saw Cene's face pale, growing almost ashen in hue as her eyes gleamed with unmistakable terror at the thought of something he was unable to comprehend.

"The captain did well, my queen," announced Throal as he inspected the two captives from a distance beyond the reach of Rald's sword. "I have slept sixty days. My daughter has rested likewise; no doubt by now she is hungry."

Rald stared at the unwavering line of spears presented before him and, reluctantly, relinquished his grasp on the weapon he had stolen and allowed it to drop, clattering, on the rock at his feet. His stand was hopeless. Angered, he felt he must protest in some way against the inhospitality with which he had been received into this kingdom, and as he was attracted least of all to the priest-like figure of the man called Throal, he chose to vent his spite in the robed one's direction.

"To Nargarth's pits with you, goat-face—and your daughter also!" he said. "By the Seven, I trust you both starve! Captive or not, I will not serve your meals!"

"No, you will not serve them, Rald," answered Throal in a quiet tone, and the ex-thief wondered how this man who had slept for the period of sixty days could know his name. "You *shall not serve!*" A circle of women with drawn swords, commanded by a single glance from Throal's piercing eyes, surrounded the rebellious prisoner. An order was given by the robed dictator: "Return them to the pits!"

Queen Cene sat upon her throne in a frozen attitude, giving neither commands nor gestures, but watching Throal like a hypnotized bird before a serpent. Her subjects led the two mercenaries back over the ground they had so recently followed, to the tunnel's mouth. Before the group had rounded the edge of the rocky fissure to traverse the ledge surrounding the amphitheater, Rald heard the man who was garbed in black say: "Tonight will do, my queen; the moon will be full. Hess will be delighted—and we, ourselves, will be provided with entertainment."

There was an undercurrent of suppressed savagery, mingled with a note of fierce exultation, in his voice.

"That thing out there on the sand is a stone image of a cat, I think," said Thwaine; "perhaps a statue of their goddess. I can see it plainer now. I wonder —by Nargarth, Rald! Do you imagine we are to be sacrifices?"

"Cene is not without beauty, is she?" inquired Rald, irrelevantly, and his fellow gave him a disgusted stare that silently spoke his mind.

WITH their wrists and ankles refastened, the mercenaries gloomily slumped on their cots and meditated upon their state. Above Rald's head a torch hissed annoyingly from its niche in the wall, and he could hear the distant and muffled roar of falling water. From the corner of an eye he observed a movement behind the bars of the doorway; he hissed at Thwaine, who lay, disconsolate, on his back. The latter sprang into an erect position, as far as his chains permitted.

The elfin features of Ating were pressed between the parallel bars.

"Woman," asked Thwaine, "have you returned to aid us or to mock us?"

"I grieve," said the guard soberly, "and I am sorry for you because of the fate that is to be yours."

"Then open this door; break these chains and we'll pick a fate for ourselves!" sneered Rald. "Sympathy is worse than poor company."

He was about to say more but hesitated at the sight of the girl's twisted countenance. She really felt sorry for them, he realized. The fact that she knew more of the destiny intended for them than they did themselves was obviously the reason for her worried attitude.

"Quiet!" whispered Ating. "I want to tell you—I want——"

"You want *what?*" asked Thwaine, sharply.

"To tell you—warn you. Cene would have allowed you to go, or perhaps have sent you to slave with the other men in the mines below, had Throal not awakened. Always it is like this! He sleeps and sleeps like one of the dead and then, suddenly, he becomes alive again and stalks the halls and the hills in quest of living food for the *thing* he calls his daughter!"

"Thing?"

"Bubaste—in the arena where our ancestors held their games. Long years ago Throal came to our country, coming in the night from some land that lies far to the east, beyond the great mountains where the white apes dwell, and with him he brought Hess. She is the animal-goddess who sleeps upon the sands. She is also known as Bubaste. Throal told the people, upon his arrival, that in the kingdom from which he had come the majority of the gods, the strongest ones, were female divinities. He said there were many more gods and goddesses in his land than the Seven we recognize and that great benefits could be reaped by us if we would but acknowledge these deities of his. Perhaps I speak sacrilege—but I have seen no bnefits. We understand, of course, that women are supreme among the human race. But to some of us it seems strange that men should be treated so—fed with Throal's drugs until they become poor, half-witted creatures while they are yet children. And that all visitors must be slain if they are men. Of course, *they are men,* but still—they are not animals."

Rald snorted, and Thwaine threw him a warning glance.

"Cene does not believe in sacrifices, but there is little she can do," continued Ating in a nervous manner. "She is a queen in title only; Throal is the true ruler of Ceipe. We all fear him—not only because of Hess but also because of his orgies in the underground chambers where he sleeps or speaks with his strange gods and where we have no permission to go. Sometimes a comrade disappears. We guess who will be the next."

"Then why obey him?" demanded the truculent Rald. "If you don't like his rule, stick him full of those spears that were aimed at me."

"He is a god. We cannot."

"Bah!" exclaimed Rald, eloquently adding several more potent adjectives as he lay back on his cot.

"Give us the keys," begged Thwaine. "We promise to remedy the situation if you only free us!"

"I no longer have them. Throal keeps them until the moon arises, when he will release you both in the pit with his daughter. She must be fed. I am only a guard. Even now I have erred, for I have forsaken my post to tell you of the things you do not understand. I am supposed to be standing forty feet from this door. I must go—now!"

Thwaine asked in gentle tones calculated not to alarm the nervous woman: "Ating, what danger threatens us in the arena!"

"Hess . . . Bubaste . . . Bast, the cat-goddess. She lives only when the moon is full. When its first rays touch her image she awakes to stalk whatever prey is convenient, and no man has ever come forth alive from the arena. If Throal chances to be asleep when the moon blooms, Hess will wander out over the desert and slay any unfortunate she may encounter. After killing a victim, she devours the body. I have seen her kill; the screaming is terrible, for she stalks her prey as a cat pursues a mouse. There is no escape from the arena, for the walls are sheer and often slippery with the evening dews."

"Where do your people keep this cat-goddess?" inquired Thwaine, while Rald lay silent on his cot and lent an anxious ear to her tremulous reply.

"Did not you see it out on the sands? In the center?"

"That was a stone image!" grunted Rald. "A sphinx—or some other Eastern idiosyncrasy. Do you seek to make fools of us, woman?"

"In the daytime it is stone," explained the girl, "but at night, when the sun is down, it quivers with life. And when the full moon illuminates the heavens it stalks the earth—and those that meet it die!"

"Listen!" yelled Rald in an angry tone. "I've had enough of this! Women who are warriors! A queen who is not a queen! Magicians that hypnotize a kingdom but sleep for sixty days! A goddess in the shape of a cat that lopes about for her dinner in the moonlight and becomes stone in the sunlight! By the Seven, Thwaine, if you must rant and rave, at least have the courtesy to do it more quietly so I can get some rest."

Twisting sideways on his uncomfortable cot, Rald promptly went to sleep, ignoring them both. Occasionally he emitted rude snorts as he slept that may have been subconscious remarks directed at the ignominy of his incarceration.

"My regrets," apologized the ever-tactful Thwaine to their wide-eyed guard. "My associate, while always the truest comrade and the bravest friend, is inclined to be suspicious of new acquaintances and somewhat dubious of magical forces. You will observe what I mean when we are placed, as you have told us we shall be, in the den of this cat-goddess."

With a stifled cry Ating abruptly fled from the bars of the cell. Whether she was possessed with solicitude for the mercenaries or filled with anger at Rald's incivility Thwaine could not determine. He mused while his companion snored. If only, he thought, he had a sword-hilt with which to soundly thwack Rald's scarred brow! Now and then some slight sound, such as the movement of a sandaled foot when its wearer changes position, told him Ating was still at her post in the corridor. But she did not come to the bars again, nor did he attempt to summon her. Disconsolately he sought to relax as best he could amid his hampering chains, and wooed Morpheus—without success.

He was still awake when tramping feet announced the return of the guard; softly he called to the sleeping Rald, but with such a note of urgency in his voice that the dazed ex-thief strove to spring to his feet, bewildered and reaching in vain for a sword he no longer wore.

"They come for us, Rald!"

"Is *that* all? I was just about to skewer King Hagar on a very excellent Livian spear—and then these cursed women come to stumble around my bedchamber!" He yawned. "Well, it will be bet-

ter to chance death in the open than to depart this world to Nargarth's pits because of foul drafts or indigestion caused by those measly portions of meat and the rank wine they left us."

There were a dozen members of the guards forming the escort; evidently either Throal or Cene, remembering Rald's desperate bid for freedom just a few hours ago, felt respect for their captive's prowess. The same woman who had acted as captain on the previous trip, her face as grim as ever, ordered the wall shackles to be refastened in their former fashion. Surrounded by a dozen ready blades the mercenaries once again followed the long passage upward toward the amphitheater.

"That waterfall you hear masks the path in and out of this mountain," whispered Thwaine to Rald. "I became conscious when the water fell on my face as they brought us beneath it the night we were taken. I believe it is the only exit! If we could reach it——"

"Perhaps we can ride out on the back of Bubaste after we have tied Throal to her tail!" sneered the other. "Don't you see, *fool,* we are closer to hell just now than to that waterfall we hear?"

THWAINE relapsed into silence but his cunning eyes continued to rove about, often touching on Ating. The latter was relieved from her station and accompanied the other guards, wearing a curious expression he could not quite define. Was the dancing, impish gleam he saw in her eyes pity for Rald and himself, or was it a smoldering but rapidly growing flame of rage, a rebellion of her spirit against whatever precedent demanded their deaths? She was young and probably had never looked upon able-bodied men of her own race, had seen only the drugged, half-witted males kept under the iron hand of the creature who claimed he had sired a goddess. At intervals, as they passed the brighter of the torches, he endeavored to attract her attention by slight movements of his imprisoned hands, but she continued to pace onward, with a lithe motion the mercenary admired; and if she sensed his efforts, she gave no sign in return.

The thought came to Thwaine's mind, as such things sometimes do with sudden and surprizing clarity, that here was a woman capable of love and loyalty, quite different from the tavern wenches to which he was accustomed. He began to turn over various impressions, as he always did before arriving at a satisfactory conclusion, and remained oblivious of the fact that his life was in jeopardy.

At last the party reached the end of the corridor and again beheld the amphitheater, where shadows gathered now as the light of the burning planet sank with its source beyond the mountain's rim. Darkness fell quickly within the hollow crater with the departure of the sun; twilight writhed in a losing struggle with the lengthening shadows and only survived momentarily because of the thin, reflected rays piercing the skies above.

The captives could see the glitter of armor on the guards standing at equal distances around the entire circle of the enclosure. As they strode through the dusk toward the place of the throne they passed two wooden-faced male slaves who carried iron pots containing live coals. At each of the warriors one of the emaciated figures would halt while the woman thrust an ironwood limb into the pot to ignite it; once the torch burned freely the slave would passively continue to the next guard and duplicate the service. Already half of the pathway was brilliant with flames held by women stationed only ten feet apart, and now the mountain's reflecting quartz began to glitter as if a million fire-flies flickered there. The

lights revealed that many of the stone seats contained occupants; apparently the entire population of Ceipe had gathered this night to witness whatever bizarre festival or entertainment was intended to take place.

There was a weirdness, an atmosphere of approaching horror, about the silent throng, and a chill not caused by the night wind rippled along the spines of the two men.

QUEEN CENE was not occupying the throne but stood at the foot of the dais supporting the great seat supposed to be a symbol of the ruling dynasty. In spite of her mail she was a beautiful figure, undisputably graceful and vibrant with life and charm. The lift of her proudly held head and the visible tenseness of her carriage seemed to proclaim that she was engaged in asserting authority of some sort. Her attitude, and the hush of the assemblage, was not lost on Rald's perceptive senses. Intuitively he knew Thwaine and he were the cause of the dispute.

Vulturous and malevolent as he had appeared in the light of day, Throal seemed even more menacing as he stood among the shifting gleams of the many torches held by the queen's personal guards, conscious of his powers and fully aware of the awe of those about him and Cene's repugnance.

Cene did not look toward the captives as they were brought to a halt just a few paces from the throne, but she must have known they had arrived; neither did she gaze at the wizard, though it was evident her remarks were addressed to him. Her pellucid eyes were fixed in an unwavering stare upon one of the many stars dotting the desert's sky about the ragged cliffs. The warriors were still as Death's angel and breathlessly awaiting the outcome of what must be, on the part of their queen, defiance to age-old custom and a dreaded overlord.

The captain of the escort stood directly in front of Rald. With a deft twist of his supple wrists he struck her across the buttocks with his chains. She leaped, involuntarily, but immediately regained her poise, bestowing upon the grinning prisoner a murderous glare holding unspoken threats.

The slight disturbance broke the tension.

"I will not condone your decision, O Throal!" declared Cene, finality in her voice. "I do not believe in this useless slaughter of men who have done us no harm. Since I was a child, I have dreaded the days when the goddess awakened; I have longed to end them for ever. We have become, under your tutelage, not a civilized, cultured country with decent inhabitants such as we once were, but a nest of cruel and vicious barbarians akin to the monstrous white apes of Sorjoon's cliffs, preying on unfortunate wanderers of the desert, cursed"—the concentrated gasps of the guards were plainly audible—"yes, *cursed* by a goddess who never bestowed anything upon the land of Ceipe but unholy terror!"

"You speak strongly, my queen," purred Throal, his countenance as suave and untroubled as his manner. The wizard's beady eyes roved over the bodies of the prisoners as if he were purchasing steaks in the market-place. They came to rest on the calm features and sturdy form of Rald, observing the latter's broad shoulders and depth of chest with a detached interest. "Could it be? No—certainly not! No queen of Ceipe would deign to descend from her throne to the level of a common mercenary!"

Even the flaring torches with all their deceptive lighting could not disguise the wave of crimson that spread over the

queen's cheeks at this impertinence. With clenched hands she faced her female warriors, but woman-like, could not resist a fleeting glance at Rald. The tall captive's head and shoulders protruded above the throng, higher than the helmets of her tallest guards; in that passing part of a second he stared straight into her eyes and the pleased smile of a child slid across his lips and was gone. She knew he was unafraid, but the pain in her breast grew greater. He did not *know!*

Her tones were calm and collected when she spoke again, but there was a desperate pleading in her words.

"My guards, my subjects, my *friends!* The rule of Hess is no more; Throal is but a name and his demons shall not plague us after this night! Somehow I know this to be true; I cannot say why, but I *know!* I am still, by right of ancestral lineage, queen of Ceipe!"

There was a murmur of approbation from the ranks before her next words struck them dumb.

"I renounce my title of priestess of Bubaste! I want no more of her black blood to stain my dynasty's mantle! I trust that all of you, even as I have done, will come to realize your immortal souls are of more value than the blind worship of a sadistic goddess and the rantings of an evil, degenerate wizard!"

The guards stood transfixed, frozen by uncertainty and the dramatic suddenness of the fierce dispute for power between their goddess' representative and their queen.

"Ha, Cene!" muttered Throal in tones so low that only the nearest could hear his words; "you were always difficult, even as a child. Perhaps . . . I should have . . . initiated you in the rites held in my private chambers, as I have others that questioned the rights of Bubaste; it is remarkable how swiftly they renounce their false gods and become devout worshippers of Hess!"

The queen paled but continued to ignore him. "Strike off the prisoner's chains!"

"Wait!" growled Throal, his voice suddenly harsh with command. The women advancing to free the mercenaries became motionless statues of indecision. "Hess, the sacred blood-relative of Bubaste, of Bast, daughter of Isis, *has already spoken their names!* You know what *that* means! It is too late. Or do you want an unforgiving goddess spreading destruction among the people of Ceipe, slaying wantonly and horribly, clawing your vitals, devouring with justifiable vengeance the ones from whom she expects reverence and homage? True, she has never harmed you before; but you have always obeyed her commands issued through myself, her priest. Now I warn you—*forget to obey the descendant of Isis and the penalty will be frightful!*"

THE women's faces grew pale beneath the torchlight and some trembled so that the flames sputtered more than ever as they swayed in the night air.

"Listen!" commanded the wizard, and even Cene was silenced by the majestic power expressed on his hairless features.

For a minute they heard only the slight sigh of the desert wind as it lifted above the mountain barrier and swept down to cleanse the odors of the crater before it rose again to pursue its wayward course, the light crackling of fire devouring ironwood, the tense breathing of someone at their side—nothing else. Then from somewhere below, where the sands of the arena were becoming faintly visible under the first lunar rays of the night, came the thin echoes of a call.

The voice held undercurrents of volume reminiscent of the great winds of the

higher mountain passes; it rose and fell with a horrible regularity, and the listeners knew they were hearing something that came not from the earth of mankind but from among the dwellers of the unknown, from the deep caverns into which no human could descend, or from the outer spaces, beyond the skies, which they could not attain. It held a feminine quality but remained inhuman; it possessed an indescribable suggestion of evilness beyond normal comprehension, playing on the nerves of even the least sensitive among them as a musician strikes a rending chord to vibrate the innermost brain-centers of his audience. Perhaps the most soul-freezing attribute of all was the distinctness of the enunciation, the realization of something unearthly pronouncing earthly syllables. The sounds, not the words themselves, pierced the ears with such insidious, mocking, *animal-like* suggestiveness that in the thoughts of all were born obscene and lewd impulses hitherto unknown by most of them. In the quality and the fluctuation of the *tone* lay the hidden horrors.

"Rald! Thwaine!" It called as sweetly as a mistress summoning her lover. "Rald! Thwaine! I am waiting!"

One of the guards uttered a low moan and fell on her knees. Others covered their eyes as if fearful of what the increasing flood of moonlight might reveal. Cene, white of face, stood motionless; the two captives looked at each other. It was rarely indeed that they saw fear in a comrade's eyes. But this was no battlefield whereon a clean death could be met honorably; it was a place where helpless, chained sacrifices were offered to some unknown, and therefore more terrifying, elemental born outside of man's knowledge. By a supreme effort Thwaine avoided duplicating the action of the prone guard. Rald felt something drip into one eye and recognized it to be a bead of perspiration.

Only Throal was untouched by the general fear. He moved forward through the ring of guards surrounding the captives, his bald head glistening beneath the lights, and assumed command while the queen was still paralyzed with superstitious awe of tradition.

"Yes, strike the chains from the prisoners—on the edge of the arena! My daughter is silent now. Do not let her grow impatient."

Part of Throal's power was based on the study of the effect of psychology on a mass; he knew when to assume leadership. There was no hesitation among the women now. Rald and Thwaine were hastily jostled to the stone lip of the arena while Cene, powerless in the face of ancient wizardry, followed her guards with uncertain steps and strained features. She had lost.

A SCORE of unsheathed swords poised at the victims' backs as their shackles were loosened and removed; Rald saw that one of the women working on Thwaine's ankles was the ashen-faced Ating and he silently cursed her under his breath. Thwaine had hopes of aid from her!

"Rald! Thwaine!" The eery cry was repeated.

Straining their eyes, the mercenaries strove to detect a moving object on the sands, which were now palely illuminated by the rising moon, but no other form was visible on the gray expanse save the bulky rock, altar, or whatever it was supposed to represent, standing in the center of the amphitheater.

"They come, daughter!" croaked Throal from the background. "They come, O Hess!"

Swords were pressed against the vic-

tims' skins, urging them to leap downward. To turn and fight would be suicide; they were weaponless and hopelessly outnumbered. There was no alternative except chancing the unknown fate below; here was certain death on cold steel. Perhaps if they rebelled their lifeless bodies would be cast down; perhaps merely crippled bodies, with less chance for defensive action against the mysterious goddess, would leave them anchored and praying for a merciful death. The two looked and read the decision in each other's eyes.

"If it be Nargarth the Devil, himself, who calls," said Rald, "at least we can spit in his face and not be skewered from behind like a pair of pigs!"

They leaped, landing in sprawling positions on soft and cushioning sand. Slowly and wordlessly they regained their feet, glancing everywhere for signs of imminent danger and perceiving none closer than the ring of torches above. Here, close to the sheer rock wall, neither the flares nor the moonlight could reveal them to the sight of the warriors, all of whom were peering down in vain efforts to view them. The mercenaries could see the women's silhouettes against the fires and the sky but remained themselves invisible. All were silent; even the weird voice was quiet now. Rald thought, uneasily, perhaps the thing knew of their arrival.

"Let us keep to the shadows of the wall and circle the pit," counseled Thwaine in a whisper. "Perhaps we can see *what* we have been presented to—and they will not know just where we are."

The advice was sound, but before the other could verbally agree there came a single, sharp cry from above and another body landed on the sand at their feet. Believing, with some reason, that all Ceipe held only their foes, Rald threw himself instantly upon the prostrate form of the newcomer and prepared to strangle him or her without compunction or regard for sex. His objective was the bright blade he perceived beneath an out-flung hand. The instant he touched the body he recognized it to be that of a female (mercenaries being skilled in such matters sometimes more than court nobles), but nevertheless, he hooked a powerful forearm around her neck from behind and prepared to exert pressure. The guard uttered a low, choking cry and feebly attempted to elude his grasp. Thwaine began to tear at his arm for some reason he could not comprehend, and he was conscious of confusion above on the pathway dominated by the hoarse voice of Throal, but before him he saw a sword. He wanted it badly; his training as a thief told him to take it as simply as possible, even if he had to break this fool woman's neck.

"Rald!" snarled his friend, savagely. "Don't, you fool! It's Ating—and she has brought us weapons!"

DUMBLY, the ex-thief relaxed his strangling hold. Ating sat up on the sand and clutched her bruised throat, with her large eyes fixed on Thwaine. On the space of sand which had been covered by her prone body lay another sword.

"By the Seven!" swore Rald. "Two!"

"I—snatched—one from another guard as I jumped," explained Ating, her voice still husky because of a compressed larynx, "so there would be one for each of you. But you die, anyway. I only thought perhaps you would die happier with swords in your hands."

She spoke to both men, but her eyes remained on Thwaine. Her voice betrayed hopelessness. With a curious catch in his own speech, Thwaine inquired: "And you—how can you get back? What will they do?"

"I cannot go back. I am a traitor, and would be sent to Throal's private chambers"—she shuddered—"and afterward, perhaps, to the goddess also. I prefer to die—as I am."

"Why have you done this—thrown your life away?"

The girl made no reply but sat caressing her injured throat, her elfin features slightly puckered, and staring at the mercenary. Something came into Thwaine's throat, too, so that he could not question her again.

"Curse it!" exclaimed Rald, who had been trying out his lately acquired weapon by attempting a quick series of parries and thrusts before an imaginary opponent; "now with a demon or goddess or something to combat, we are not satisfied, but must also acquire a woman to protect!"

"I will bother myself with the task," said Thwaine. His voice was low, but so earnest and strange, so devoid of his customary mocking tones, that Rald stared at him in a vain effort to decipher a hidden meaning. Was Thwaine being clever again? His words were almost a threat. "Do not disparage my—friend. She has brought me something besides a sword."

"Well, I do not want to seem churlish," said Rald. He smiled at the wide eyes of the girl-warrior. "A thousand thanks for the weapon, Ating; I dedicate it to you!"

Above the three, many faces hung over the cliff's edge as the women of Ceipe scrutinized the area of sand for a sign of their sacrifices. Throal was not visible, but his voice reached their ears as he issued commands, most of which pertained to the handling of the flares, and it seemed his hitherto calm demeanor had changed to a mood of fanatical frenzy. He was worried because the victims could not be located. He cursed the warrior who had carried weapons to the arena, and threatened her with a terrible vengeance. Once Rald heard Cene's voice, and although he could not distinguish her words, it seemed to him her tones held a hint of suppressed hysteria.

Rald clutched his sword-hilt fondly and gazed upward, beyond the torches and helmets of the warrior host, to where the stars of the heavens had begun to twinkle about the yellow planet whose beams were distributed alike over friend and foe. Perhaps there was madness in the lunar rays, mused the ex-thief; perhaps the great orb possessed the power to change mortals into demonic shapes as the seers of so many lands proclaimed, but to him it seemed that a strength beyond the ken of physicians or the use of drugs flowed from those same beams to mingle with his blood-stream; he felt exultant beneath the rays, free like the desert winds, capable of confronting any difficulty he should chance to encounter. Perhaps—it was a wild fancy, but perhaps *he* was one of the chosen, a child of that great planet, waxing and waning in his impulses, his contrast of a life of thievery mingled with heroic and generous deeds, even as the dead world was accredited with forces both good and evil. Certainly, beneath its rays, he gained a confidence in his own ability and ultimate preservation he had never experienced beneath the light of day.

"I think," he said softly to his companions, who had drawn close together and had forgotten he was even present, "I think I will go out there and look at this goddess."

"Oh, no!" cried Ating, clutching Thwaine's arm. "By now she will be awakening! Soon she will be able to move—and then we die!"

RALD laughed so loudly and with such barbarous mirth that all the inhabitants of Ceipe above gazed at their neighbors in wonderment and a faint flush reappeared on the white cheeks of a queen who had forsaken her throne. Screams, curses, cries of terror were commonly heard from the arena, even the horrible gurgling of hysteria and the cackling utterances of madness, but never before in the bloody circumference of the pit had such easy, natural laughter rung from the depths. It had not the tone of madness.

"Since this Hess is so slow in coming to me, I will go to her!" said Rald aloud, careless of the ears above. "Who am I, to slight a goddess? I weary of this waiting—and she *called* me, did she not?"

Naked sword in hand, he trod boldly out across the sand into the glow of moonlight. Though a faint tremor of fear still lingered in his heart, he had decided that if he must die his should not be a craven's death; once within the circle of the full rays his courage was renewed. He waved his blade derisively at the gaping faces on the rim of the pit and hoped its swing included the section occupied by Throal; felt a little proud, too, that Cene should witness his swashbuckling.

"He is right," said Thwaine, relinquishing Ating's arms. "Wait here. We will see what is yonder on the sands."

He grasped his weapon and set forth to follow his comrade, who was already some distance ahead of him, and was immediately aware of a slim form at his side.

"Yes," said Ating sadly; "we will see!"

A low hum, a whisper of sound, arose from the galleries and relapsed into silence again as a thousand warriors beheld Thwaine and the woman who had chosen to die with him enter the circle of revealing light. Rald looked quickly over his shoulder, scenting possible danger, and smiled when he saw the two. He did not lessen his stride; he intended to encounter whatever unknown danger threatened them within the arena—first.

As the intrepid three approached the bulky object resting upon the sands, they became aware of lines and contours impossible to perceive from a distance. The image was that of a great cat or black panther such as was to be encountered in the far eastern lands. It appeared to be a work of art, there beneath the soft rays of the moon, a magnificent conception by some sculptor of a forgotten eon; for the great curvature of the ebony back, the perfection of the outspread limbs, the superb poise of the upheld head, gave the impression to an onlooker that here a sleeping beast was just awakening to awareness of its surroundings. It was a monument to its creator, thought Rald, who had seen many varied forms of sculpture during his rovings. Even the ridges in the flesh-like stone of its forepaws were plainly visible to the three, and the arch and structure of the entire form were so imitative of feline character that for a brief moment the mercenaries thought it alive. It rested as a cat does, with its forepaws stretched ahead of the body and the spine curved downward in the middle part of the sleek back. Thwaine saw a likeness to carvings made of the strange-headed idol known as the sphinx. The reclining body covered a full twenty-five feet of the sands, exceeding by ten any living and natural denizens of the forests in the lands infested by the black panthers. The image bore a regal air, possessed a certain calmness and royal bearing that held a hint of implacable omnipotence; Rald thought, inconsequently, of the face of a statue he had seen in his wanderings, an idol

named Buddha. Somehow the image of Ceipe's cat-goddess had assumed the same brooding attitude of detached immobility the dimly recalled features of the god of the yellow peoples expressed.

The mercenary cautiously approached the side of the image. Tall of stature as he was, he was still at too low a level to see over the ebony spine. He examined the figure, passing from one extremity to the other, as well as he could beneath the deceptive rays of moonlight. Once he thought the stone flanks were heaving like those of an animal drawing breath. When he struck lightly at the ribs of the figure with his sword, the metal rang against what appeared to be solid rock. Ruefully, he examined the blade to see if its edge was dulled.

ROUNDING the image, seeking for a view of the face, he encountered Thwaine and Ating. The girl was clinging to the man's arm in sheer terror; why, Rald could not understand. Certainly, there seemed to be no danger in the image even if it did exude a baleful atmosphere, probably manufactured by the impressions made on their subconsciousness after the weird calling of their names. He must discover, he reasoned, the source of the voice, for there lay the threat to their safety. Obviously, he had to accomplish this task alone, for Thwaine showed no inclination to desert the side of his warrior-mistress.

"Look!" cried Ating suddenly. "Oh, look!"

Following with his eyes the direction of her pointed finger, Rald gazed upward at the great head. The sculpturing was excellent, he thought; if he had been looking upon a head of more proportionate size he could easily have been beguiled into believing the idol a living, breathing panther. The great ears were correctly placed; tufts of hair sprouted from them, and though the upper lip was shadowed he believed he could detect traces of whiskers. The mouth was slightly open, and he could see a double row of fangs. Apparently the artist had taken pains to produce a masterpiece, for even the flat nostrils were tipped with vermilion at their extremities like those of a living beast.

And then he saw the eyes. . . .

A cold horror, spreading through his veins from the very marrow of his bones, paralyzed his body as his brain registered the fact that *the eyes were alive!*

Bubaste was no myth, but a living, slaying goddess! He recalled the tales of the mangled and lacerated victims found wandering, half crazed, over the desert wastes, their stories of the massacres of entire villages by a cat-like demon who descended without warning or mercy, calling the names of those it slew with a human tongue; and he knew that what he had listened to with derision around many a forgotten campfire was hideous truth. Malevolent, gleaming with unspeakable knowledge and savage ferocity, the great yellow eyes contemplated the puny humans between her paws; there was a trace of gloating in the depths of the fixed orbs suggestive of the brooding of a cat as it awaits with tense muscles for a captured mouse to make a futile effort to escape doom.

In the face of violent danger or threat of death Rald nearly always became infuriated, even with inanimate objects such as the rocks of an engulfing landslide or the swirling waters of a deep ford; perhaps he was an atavism, a reversion to instincts in character to ancestors who had fought with tooth and nail to maintain the breath of life in a treacherous and beast-ridden world. It was with difficulty that he restrained the impulse to slash at

the image, or goddess, with his sword. He realized that the weapon would shatter with the first blow struck against the adamantine ribs; steel was worthless before whatever element formed the living figure. Perhaps, he thought, when the thing fully recovered its powers it would be more susceptible to the influence of cold steel. There was a light in the mercenary's eyes not unlike the gleam in the baleful yellow pupils above him, except that his reflected rage and not cruelty.

Muttering an imprecation, he thrust his sword at a forepaw. The limb trembled, moved, lifted a full foot above the surface of the sand, and fell back limply. It scattered particles over their sandaled feet.

Hess was slowly coming to life!

THWAINE and Ating stood in frozen attitudes, fearful of their fates and watching Rald as he so carelessly prodded the recumbent monster. He turned toward them, still keeping a wary eye on the living mass of stone, and advised: "Suppose we place a little distance between this thing and us; I have an idea it would be safer. There seems to be no escape from the pit, and my blade is worthless against this solid hide; so let us play the defensive; perhaps Hess will more readily feel steel when she has fully awakened."

"Soundly reasoned!" declared Thwaine.

The three retreated toward the edge of the arena. They had almost regained the partial security of the shadows when the spectators above uttered low cries. Rald sensed the reason immediately and whirled in his tracks; Hess had arisen and, cat-fashion, was stretching the muscles of her back. Against the splendor of the full moon her powerful body was an impressive and terrifying sight; for the mammoth portions of her bulk, combined within the sleek, graceful, undulative physique, appeared as a masterpiece formed by some unknown god in a mad mood of creation. Rald was suddenly aware of his own smallness before this creature who was not of the earth nor of the clay from which he himself was molded.

"Take the left," he advised Thwaine. "I'll turn to the right. Whichever way the beast attacks, the man opposite can engage her from behind." In spite of the seriousness of their plight Rald could not still his laughter; it rang rich and strong to astonished ears above. "I have never pricked a goddess in the rear; I assure you it will afford me immense satisfaction!"

They separated, Thwaine and Ating scurrying to the left; Rald, calm once more as he surveyed the face of Death, striding to the right. On the edge of the black shadow cast by the sheer wall he paused to gaze upward. Somewhere in the throng above was Cene, who had tried to save them from death; somewhere, too, was Throal, who had condemned them. He intended to settle with both.

The monster was still stretching. Something in its poise hinted that the interlude of exercise was about over; so his voice became urgent when he cried: "Cene, are you there?"

He was rewarded by the sight of the queen's face, illuminated by torchlight as it was thrust over the edge of the pit.

"Rald!" There was a note in her voice that caused his heart to leap. "Swords are useless! Take this!"

A burning ironwood brand fell, or was cast, handle downward so that its end was buried in the sand while the flare continued undiminished. It landed but a few feet from the mercenary.

Again the eery cry arose. This time the goddess called only one.

"Thwaine! Thwaine!"

Thwaine was silent, but Ating screamed, her cry shattering itself into a hundred fragmentary echoes against the enclosing cliffs. The fleeing pair had reached a point directly beneath the gap in the mountain wall where stood the throne of Ceipe; above them Throal's bald features were etched in torchlight as he eagerly observed the fugitives' progress.

Rald, perceiving he had not been chosen for the first victim, turned in his tracks. Helplessly, his grasp grew firm about the hilt of his futile sword. A warmth of emotion flooded his breast; it was the old, familiar feeling he had so often experienced before hopeless odds—the calm strength of desperation. The grim smile he had exhibited to Hagar's hosts played across his taut features. Even the sight of Hess, beginning to creep slowly across the sands in the manner of a cat stalking a mouse, did not erase his expression. Rald had ceased to be a worried, tormented thing of flesh and bone and was now somewhat god-like himself. His friends were endangered; he was willing to offer the last drop of his blood in their defense.

"Rald!" cried Cene's voice. "The torch! It fears fire! Take the torch!"

Without an upward glance the mercenary swept up the burning ironwood with his left hand. Carrying bare steel in his right hand, he raced across the arena.

THWAINE had halted at a spot where the ring of shadows drew a definite line about the moonlit area of the pit. He knew his destiny was hopeless, that death was near to both himself and his companion, she who crouched behind his squat shoulders. But he was prepared to sell their lives as dearly as possible. He hoped his sword could penetrate the tough skin of the creeping monster, and hummed an old and half-forgotten battle-song as he watched Hess lounge nearer.

The animal-goddess took her time; there was no trace of haste in her strides.

"We die now, I think," said Ating over his shoulder. To Thwaine's surprize her voice was steady and without a tremor. "Good-bye, my dear."

"We are not yet dead!" insisted Thwaine, stubbornly.

Above them loomed the great bulk of Hess, stone-like and stolid no longer, but now a living, breathing, threatening death, fantastic and incredible beneath the moonbeams, but, nevertheless, a certain and horrible doom. She raised a great paw above the man's head, holding it there with the playfulness of a cat toying with a mouse, and regarded the desperate mercenary with immense, yellow, unblinking eyes. A shudder shook his very soul when the thing purred. He slashed at the forepaw with his blade; it moved negligently—and his sword lay twenty feet away while he nursed a sprained wrist. Armless and defenseless, Thwaine faced the death before him, became conscious of Ating at his side, and suddenly laughed into the poised face of the being that the people of Ceipe called a goddess.

"Curse you!" he cried. "Though you slay us, we remain your betters—*animal!*"

Hess snarled and lifted the crushing paw.

At that instant Rald arrived, unnoticed, at her right flank. He struck fiercely, trusting his blade would sink deep into the vitals; to his dismay it was shattered into fragments against the ribs of the giant cat. Hess felt the blow, for she turned her head to see the rash intruder who had interrupted her pleasantry, momentarily ignoring the selected sacrifices,

and swung a weighty paw in Rald's direction. Instinctively, he dodged, well aware of the death in those curving claws. Sand slipped beneath his feet. He fell toward the adamantine ribs of the goddess. In a last desperate effort to maintain his balance he extended his left hand, which still held the torch Cene had thrown to him. The flaming brand was pressed forcibly against the side of the goddess of Ceipe.

The next minute none of the three could ever clearly describe. All they ever remembered was the ear-splitting, anguished wail emitted by Hess, a momentary view of flame-shot heavens, and the impact of a mighty concussion that hurled them prone on the sands.

RALD was tossed a distance of ten feet or more. His first confused impression, as he struggled against an almost overwhelming desire to lapse into unconsciousness, was that Throal was present and had struck him with magical powers. Fighting nausea, he managed to control his weakened limbs to the extent of rising to his knees. A few yards away Thwaine and Ating, unconscious, lay side by side. Of Hess there remained no trace, except for a small pile of gray ashes that were loosely scattered over the area of sand upon which she had been standing. Slowly the realization seeped into Rald's brain that Hess had been destroyed, was gone for ever into whatever limbo the daughters of Isis returned—perhaps because he had touched her side with the flames. For some inexplicable reason, according to some mysterious chemistry, the goddess who defied spear and sword was not immune to fire. He had annihilated, by accident, the incarnation of Bubaste!

During the short interval after the concussion there had been no sounds from the galleries above them; now the stunned silence was abruptly broken by wild cries pitched in many keys. Only one voice rose in anger; the others expressed only bewilderment. The throng could not understand the meaning of the fiery blast and the consequent disappearance of Hess. Screaming high above the many feminine voices were the harsh tones of the wizard, Throal, who alone comprehended the happenings in the arena.

"Down! Go down to the arena!" he shrieked. "Recapture the men and the woman! *They shall pay—ho! How they shall pay!* O spirit of Bubaste, O soul of Isis! Grant me the power to devise a fitting torture for these three!"

Rope ladders were swung over the lip of the pit, but for a time they were empty, for the warriors hesitated as they recalled the fates of the many unfortunates that had preceded them.

"Down!" commanded Throal. He was not a pleasant sight; his thick lips were curled back, revealing a set of fangs not unlike a miniature duplicate of the deceased goddess', and flecks of foam were visible at the corners of his mouth. "Down, fools! There is nothing there to harm you; my daughter is slain and unless I can again raise her body from the ashes the walls of Ceipe will go undefended!"

Several of the more hardy warriors swarmed down the trailing ropes. Emboldened by their example, others followed. Throal, a trifle ridiculous in his long robe, also descended.

Rald had regained his feet and Thwaine had stirred feebly. Ating was still unconscious.

The ex-thief found a fragment of his sword, merely the hilt and a few inches of the blade that had been covered by the sand. Taking the shortened steel in a hand that still ached from the force of

his fall, he placed his body between the prostrate figures of his friends and the assemblage now advancing over the sands.

He did not intend to be recaptured. His weapon was but a puny defense against the many blades and throwing-spears of the warrior-women, but he was determined to die cleanly, before weapons he understood, rather than suffer unnamable atrocities in some underground place of torture.

Behind him he heard a movement; Thwaine was on his knees and searching for his sword.

"You had better kill the girl," advised Rald. "It would be kinder."

"No!"

The ejaculation of dissent came from one of the members of the approaching group; none other than the queen could so pronounce a single syllable with such astonishing emphasis. It was she who had cried out. She was walking swiftly, keeping to the front of the group; though her bearing was calm enough, the bright spots on her cheeks and the rapid rise and fall of her breasts beneath her mail betrayed an intense excitement. In one slender hand was a short throwing-spear and she carried it with the manner of one accustomed to its use.

THE group, led by Throal and Cene, halted just a few feet from the mercenaries.

This, thought Rald, was the last stand. Their death was assured; a single shaft thrown by one of the party might pierce the flesh of both Thwaine and himself. He clutched the hilt of his broken blade defiantly and wondered if he could slice Throal's throat before he died. He looked upon the flushed beauty of the queen and it occurred to him that since a man had to die it was well to see beauty with the last look at life.

"Do not kill Ating!" pleaded Cene as she came near enough to make herself heard. "I promise you—no harm will come to her. Nor to you, either. The reign of Hess is over and our land is free of a great evil that has preyed upon it these many years."

"Queen!" shrieked the wizard, his features twisted like those of a madman. "You do not know what you say! Many years ago devout grandfathers of yours, descendants of your own royal blood-line, had the honor to receive in person the visitation of the Goddess Bubaste——"

"Weak tools of yours, O wizard!" interrupted Cene. "Weak grandparents of mine! Fools deserving the slavery to which you eventually subjected them! How many of my blood-relatives, male members of royalty, are laboring with drugged and vacant minds in the pits, or serving your mistresses in your unholy dwelling-quarters? Does it amuse you, Throal, to demean your betters?"

"Queen Cene!" cried Throal. "There lie the ashes of my daughter——"

"Yes. And it is well! At last we are delivered from this demon that ruled only by fear and the craze of blood-hunger! It is well that I discovered it feared fire—you, yourself, gave the secret away to me when you protested so strongly about the torches overhanging the arena. If such a thing as this was your child, as you have so often claimed, then you cannot be entirely human or fit to direct the destiny of Ceipe! *I will test your invulnerability!*"

The queen of Ceipe suddenly cast her spear at Throal's chest.

In the stillness surrounding the motionless group the impact of the shaft and the sound of riven flesh was plainly

heard. It struck in the region of the heart, pierced the lean form and protruded several inches behind the wizard's shoulder blades. He did not fall at once, and his convulsive fury was horrible to see. Clutching at the handle of the spear in a vain effort to withdraw the shaft, he swayed on his feet while great drops of perspiration beaded his hairless face and brow. The lips curled like those of an enraged animal. Between the set teeth poured a stream of gibberish in some unknown language. The rise and fall of Throal's tones, interrupted as they were by his spasmodic breathing, was vaguely reminiscent of an incantation. At last, while all remained speechless with stupefaction, he fell as a tree of the forest falls —full-length and motionless after he struck the sands.

For once in his life Rald was incapable of swearing.

"Look!" he cried, as if all of them were not staring at the dead evil which they had once thought to be endowed with everlasting life and the essence of immortality in mind and body. "Look! He . . . *it* . . . changes!"

A curious transmutation was taking place. The smooth flesh of the head began to wither and crack as if subjected to intense heat; pieces of the skin became loose and curled like dry paper. In a few seconds the entire substance composing the head, excluding the skull itself, had fallen away in the form of dust. The ashes, curiously, resembled the remains of Hess. A fleshless skull, with empty eyesockets wherein the magnetic orbs of the wizard had once rested, stared into eternity from its position on the sand. The black robe had collapsed also. Its crumpled outlines suggested that the same change had taken place in the body members. Throal was a naked skeleton; whatever witchcraft had preserved his shape through the centuries had departed into the hellish depths from which he had extracted it. The only remaining proof of his existence was the yellow bones of the skeleton that had, only a short time before, supported the semblance of an active and living man.

"Throal is dead!" announced the queen. She strove for a stern tone, but a quaver crept into her voice. "We will have no more of goddess or wizardry in the kingdom of Ceipe!"

"How about *men?*" inquired Rald with a quiet satisfaction.

"The men will be cured of their drug habits. A year or two will perhaps bring them out of the stupor into which this evil wizard forced them. I knew it was not right to keep the men in slavery, but I could do nothing against Throal as long as his creature lived. For had we slain him, Hess would have destroyed us all. We are grateful to you for——"

"For nothing! Had you not cast me the torch, my friends and I would now be shapeless things with crushed bones. But I am thinking of the men, Cene. A 'year or two' is—a long time!"

"You forget yourself!" She could not misconstrue his meaning; there had been a faint suggestion of sarcasm in his voice. She became imperious. "I am Cene, queen of Ceipe, and——"

"Once a priestess of Bast," interposed Rald, gentle of tone and manner, "the goddess whose dust is now mingled with these common sands. Once dead, Cene, you too will become but coarse dust into which the careless footprints of a future generation will be unfeelingly imprinted; your beauty will be spoken of with a halting remembrance—or perhaps imparted to posterity in the form of a graven bust that could only retain a frozen likeness of yourself. You will be dead! And all

the pomp and splendor, all the homage and adulation which you have received, will dissolve into some casual observer of your image inquiring: 'Who *was* Cene?'

"WHAT is royalty, Cene? If you have the strength and the power to rule well, then you deserve credit, of course. But what of yourself? Have you no desires of your own? Is it necessary for you to sacrifice all the pleasures of a lifetime because of one little mountain kingdom? Perhaps you have the impression that you could not be replaced or that the order of your dynasty should not change? What say your subjects? As long as they possess a wise and untroublesome ruler, do you think they care what dynasty produced their figurehead? There are lights in your eyes that proclaim you to be too young for celibacy, Cene!"

"Are you proposing yourself as a fitting——"

"Why not? I could have been a king. I can fight better than most of them, I have found. But I discovered the life of a common mercenary is apt to last longer. I have fought in many wars and under many ensigns. I have slept in royal beds. Maybe the next night I slept in a gutter —but what of it? Once I was a thief in Forthe; once a slave under Hagar. But if I died this next moment I can still say that I have lived! Could you?"

"I—believe not," answered the queen. She thoughtfully prodded at the sand with her sword.

"Thwaine!" shouted Rald.

His comrade detached himself from the group of women gathered about the skeleton; that is, he detached himself from the ring of inquisitive females but not from Ating, who skipped happily along behind his squat figure like the rudder of a ship.

"Thwaine is a competent fellow," explained Rald to the queen. "A clever diplomat and a fierce fighting-man. On occasion, he can become even wiser than I, though I hate to endanger his complacency by admitting it."

"Indeed?" Cene's eyebrows were arched.

"Yes. Let Thwaine and Ating rule your precious kingdom of rock and sand for the space of a year. Then return to see if your former subjects are prepared to cast roses beneath your feet or are willing to stage a rebellion to place your—well, to reseat you on the throne!"

"And where would I be during this time?"

"With me," said Rald, simply. His features were eloquent.

Cene stared at him but could not manage a reply.

"Come," ordered Rald; "get these overwrought females off these polluted sands and back to their respective stations; find me a place to sleep for what remains of the night, and tomorrow you may guide me to the waterfall. Together we will breathe some purer air than the fetid atmosphere I detect here. No?"

"Yes," said Cene, and the smile on her crimson lips caused the mercenary's heart to skip its regular beat.

The Strangling Hands

By M. G. MORETTI

The story of the Eye that was stolen from an idol in a jungle shrine, and the weird doom that pursued those who stole it

THERE was no explanation, but just a brief telegram, which was delivered to me at the lake where I was spending the summer:

NEED HELP STOP FORGIVE PAST AND COME AT ONCE
ANTHONY HENDERSON.

It took me some three hours to decide to leave my comparatively cool summer cabin for Tony Henderson's little apartment, but finally, curiosity overcoming my hatred of the man, I packed an overnight case and headed my Ford for the city.

I remember looking back at my little cabin with a twinge of regret; I wonder how much longer that look would have been had I known then it was to be my last! But personal danger had never entered my mind; danger to Tony Henderson, perhaps, but then I felt no sympathy for him. It was only curiosity that took me to him now—curiosity to know why he had appealed for help from me, of all people.

We had not spoken to each other for over two years; that telegram was the first direct word I had had from him since the day his book had come out. *His* book! The very thought sent a flash of red before my eyes, blinding them to the road ahead. And we had been friends before that, close friends, close as only terrific hardships can make men.

There had been five of us on the Clark-Milroy African Expedition in 1925. We had come back with tales of discoveries and adventures which, though perhaps not the most important, were certainly the most interesting of the decade. They were tales that needed no fictional skill to make them gripping, no colorful adjectives to vivify them; they thrilled for the mere telling. And *I* was to tell them to the world; that was the point—I was to be the teller, but Anthony Henderson, in the end, was the man who told.

There had been no legal bond to keep him from writing that book, but it had certainly been a gentleman's agreement that I was to write it. Both Clark and Milroy had asked me to join for just that purpose, and Tony knew it. But what rankled chiefly was his not telling me, letting me prepare the lengthy manuscript only to find on submitting it to my publishers that his book was already on the press. Some said I took my bad luck too heavily; others called Tony Henderson a thief and a cad, but no one who heard that quarrel we staged in the lobby of the Metropolitan Theatre wondered that he and I did not speak again.

And here he was asking me to visit him. He had ten friends to my one, friends who would give him time, money, anything he needed. The only possibility was that something had come up about the expedition, and that he needed advice from someone who had been with it. Captain Clark, Bobbie Milroy, and the Persian—"Cheeky," we called him—they were dead. But what thing important enough could have brought Anthony Henderson to ask me to forgive the past?

I REACHED the dignified, conservative apartment-hotel at dinnertime. Tony's rooms were on the fourth floor facing a sunny, flowery courtyard. It was a strangely incongruous setting for what was to happen that night.

His secretary-valet let me in. I noticed that the man's face was unnaturally gray and that his eyes showed signs of a sleepless night.

"Mr. Henderson is expecting you, sir." He seemed grateful that I had arrived.

Tony turned abruptly from his position at the window.

"Mac! My God, man, but I'm glad you came!" He came forward eagerly, with outstretched hand.

I ignored the gesture. "Hullo, Tony," I said. Then to cover the awkward pause, "You look damn sick."

He ran a hand across his white forehead. "Do I?" he said, and laughed.

"Well, what's up?" I demanded rather sharply.

"I generally have dinner downstairs. That all right with you, or shall we go out somewhere?"

Our conversation was perfunctory until the head waiter had found us a table in

"The stone of Nyi was never found after the night of Tony's death."

a secluded corner and Tony had ordered the regular dinner.

"Well, what's up?" I asked again. "Something to do with 1925?"

He started violently. "How'd you know?"

"It wasn't hard to guess. You have *friends* to go to when you want other things."

He gave a rueful little smile. "Prejudices die hard around you, don't they, Mac? But you'll be glad—in the end—that I wrote that book."

"What is it you want?"

His smile vanished. "You have a lot of data on the religious beliefs and ceremonies of the Bhan-Guru tribe. I need your help."

"If I had had the opportunity of putting it in print, you could have gone to the public library," I said with some bitterness.

There was terror in his eyes. "I'm a dirty skunk, I admit it. I admit anything. But you've got to help me—*got* to!"

And that was the last time I thought of Anthony Henderson's book, until now, months later as I write trying to explain the unexplainable, because courts of law believe that when a man is killed, it must be by a human and visible agent.

"Well," I said, "let's have it."

Although there was no one near us, he lowered his voice.

"It's about the temple of Nyi, and death." He looked up questioningly. "You remember that temple?"

"Of course," I said. "Where the priests of Bhan-Guru laid human sacrifices to Nyi, their god of death. Nothing particularly interesting, as I remember, except the pretty visible proof that the custom was still extant, and the two eyes of the statue that shone a smoky greenish gray or blue at night. Captain Clark took one out for his collection, as I remember."

Tony's gaze was riveted on my face.

"Well, what about it?" I demanded.

"Do you remember, Mac, how Nyi's victims were killed?"

After a bit I said, "Strangled. Some were throttled to death by the fingers of the priests; others had ropes drawn about their throats. Bloodless but unpleasant. I don't get the connection with you."

"I didn't, either, until seven days ago. We stole that eye, Mac; we ravaged the statue of Nyi. We were the enemies of the god of death. Oh, there's a connection all right."

"If you're going to start some nonsense about a curse running around the globe from one generation to another, you can save your breath. I may be a fool, but I'm not as big a one as that."

"Listen," he said. "On the seventh of July, 1925, we took a stone from the statue of Nyi. It was just after midnight, when the priests were sleeping below the altar steps. Captain Clark put it among his curios in the bank vault when he reached this country. In July of 1926 Captain Clark was murdered."

"I was in Europe at the time," I said dryly, "but I heard from reliable sources that Clark committed suicide."

"You heard that because the courts demand a material explanation of death. They found him locked in an empty boathouse, hanging from a crossbeam."

"Men have been known to hang themselves. It isn't a physical impossibility."

"That's true enough. But no one was able to explain what he stepped off from into space, and——"

"If the jury was satisfied, I am."

"Very well. His collection, including the eye of death, went to Milroy, of course, and a year later—again in July—Bobby died."

"But in a hospital bed," I said, "from a known disease."

"He died of strangulation, just as though the fingers of a priest of Nyi had been at his throat. He died at seven minutes after midnight on the seventh day of the seventh month."

"Good lord, Tony! I refuse to listen to that sort of rot. Bobby's death was tragic enough without having your morbid interpretations. Tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do it, but I won't be drawn into admitting the possible power of a baseless superstition."

"Milroy died in July of '27. Two months before that my book had come off the press. That's why 'Cheeky' was the third to die—because Milroy, disgusted with you and me, had willed the collection to him." He fingered a saltcellar to steady his trembling fingers. "In July of '28, just a year ago, the press got word from South America that a Persian, Hadji Cheekh ol-Molk, who had been with the Clark-Milroy Expedition, had been murdered—done to death by 'person or persons unknown.' "

" 'Cheeky' had enemies," I reminded him.

"Yes, and he had the sacred stone of Nyi."

"That's beyond the point—mere coincidence."

"Very well. But 'Cheeky' had the eye; remember that. He was in an open two-seater plane flying from Rio to Victoria. The pilot swore he left the port the second 'Cheeky' had entered the cockpit behind him. Later, when the authorities badgered him, he changed the 'I know' to 'I think.' 'Cheeky' was dead when they landed—strangled to death, and no landings had been made. It was obvious he had been murdered before the plane left Rio at midnight. I thought so, too—last July. But now——" His voice trailed off into nothingness.

THE man's persistence was getting on my nerves. "That's what *you* think."

"That's what I *know*—now. 'Cheeky' left no will. His personal junk went to some relatives; Captain Clark's collection was sent on to me, because of the book. That's why you may be glad you never got the chance I stole from you."

"Don't be a damn fool, Tony!"

"The Eye is here now, in a safe in my room. And the month is July. It's the sixth day. After midnight it will be the seventh."

"There's absolutely no connection between what you've been telling me and that stone. Coincidence, I'll admit, but anything else is pure bunk."

"So I thought a week ago. But each night since then——" He looked around and then continued in a low, rapid voice. "The first night they came no nearer than the far side of the room."

"What came?"

"The hands" — impatiently — "the hands of a priest of Bhan-Guru. They were black, and the blue light made them shine like liquid jet. The nails were bluish green like the stone. They were there for perhaps a half-minute. Then I turned on the light and looked at the time. It was seven minutes after midnight."

He gave a convulsive shudder and went on, "The next night I waited up for them. At seven after twelve they were there again; this time within six feet of where I sat. And the next night and the next night I waited for them and always they were there and always a little nearer, and when I turned on the light it was always seven minutes after midnight. The fifth night I could reach out to where they were, but my hand touched

nothing—and still—my God!—they were there!"

His whole body was trembling. I put my hand across his wrist and he threw it off.

"Last night I made Johnson—he's my secretary, you saw him—I made him sit up with me. He was like you; he thought I was crazy. But now he knows. They touched my throat last night, gently like the wings of a moth; but they were there—I saw them—jet-black in the blue mist. And when we switched on the lights, it was seven minutes after midnight."

He leaned back in his chair, tipping his glass between trembling thumb and forefinger. "Johnson saw them. *Now* do you believe?"

I gulped down my coffee, lit a cigarette, and got to my feet before answering. "I don't know, Tony, whether you're a picturesque story-teller or just a damned liar, but I'm going home. Thanks for the dinner and the legend."

Tony's face lost its white tenseness for a look of blank surprize. "You're leaving me, Mac? You're leaving me?" He sprang up and caught me by the shoulders. "You can't go! Don't you understand? It's tonight I need your help—tonight! You've got to help me, Mac." His voice sank to a whisper. "Are you afraid to stay?"

My temper got the better of me. "I've had enough of your lying!"

He looked straight at me. "What I've been telling you is the truth, Mac."

"The truth!" But something in his eyes kept me from pure jeering, led me to explain. "There's a flaw in your tale that you overlooked, Tony," I said quietly. "Why if you were so afraid of hands, did you wait for them in the dark?"

"Not in the dark," he said without a moment's hesitation.

I drew him toward the elevators. "The room was lighted, eh? Very sensible precaution! Then why did you have to turn *on* the lights to find out the time?"

He turned to me in complete boyish amazement. "Why—why, I don't know. It must have got dark gradually. I don't remember."

"Next time," I suggested, "be more consistent in your story-telling."

"It's the truth," he said. "They must have gone off. I can't explain it, but that's the truth."

BACK in his apartment, I continued to pick flaws. "Well, now, admitting it *was* light at, say, eleven-thirty, and that it *was* dark at twelve-five or thereabouts, and that you *didn't* realize when the change occurred, tell me this: how could you see black fingers in a dark room? You don't suppose you fell asleep and dreamed it all?"

"You've got to stay, you've got to help me, Mac! Together we can keep them off. Alone—I'll die!" He looked suddenly nothing more than a boy, and I was sorry for him. "Think what you like of me, Mac, demand what you like. I'll pay anything to break their power. I want to live!" The high, feverish voice broke to a low, dead monotone. "You'll have to stay. You understand about the priests of that damned idol. You'll know what to do when they come to get me."

"Wouldn't half a dozen cops with guns be more useful?"

"You won't do that — you can't! They'd say I was crazy and lock me up. And when the time came, I'd be alone with no one to help me." He put his arm through mine. "You'll stay, Mac?"

"If only to prove you a liar," I said cheerfully.

He told Johnson that I was staying, and the man left us for his own room

with an expression in which relief and fear struggled almost comically for supremacy.

"Either he's a damned good actor, Tony, or else he drank too much last night."

But Henderson, fumbling with the combination to the safe, did not hear me. Presently, he closed the safe's door and turned around with a small jewelry box, which he handed me opened. The stone itself was a misty blue green, something like the powdered opaqueness of costume jewelry. About half an inch in diameter and not quite a perfect circle, it was as insignificant an object as one could find.

"It seems innocent enough," I said judicially, returning the box. "It looked more promising when I saw it on the statue."

Without answering, Henderson led me into a small study that opened off from his bedroom, shutting the door behind him.

"Sit down there." He pointed to a chair by the center table. He took the stone from its cotton bed and laid it on the empty table at my elbow. "Now watch it."

He turned off the center light from the switch by the door. I waited in the blackness of the curtained room for perhaps thirty seconds. Then quite suddenly a little blur of light appeared where Tony had laid the stone. It was only a misty blur at first, a fuzzy mistiness that seemed to waver in its own half-light. The colors, blue and green, came out as I watched, but instead of defining the stone they served rather to increase its indefiniteness. The light itself was larger than the stone, but was a part of it, as though the darkness drew from the stone an inner glow. No wonder those child-like jungle creatures had taken it for the eye of their god of death.

"Interested, Mac?" he asked. Then, picking up the stone and replacing it in the cotton-lined box, "Strange rather, isn't it?"

For a minute there in the dark I had felt that same awed wonder, but now I shook it off as absurd.

"No, as a mater of fact, it isn't strange. Any geologist could explain that light for you."

"Yes, but no geologist could explain the hands."

"A glass of whisky may have been the answer to those."

"Is that a hint, Mac?"

"No, thanks. And you're not to drink any either. We'll dispel this ghost theory tonight."

"I drank nothing last night," he said.

"Really? Indeed!"

He left the room for a minute and came back with an armful of magazines and newspapers. "Try some of these. They'll interest you more than I will."

Without denying that likelihood, I opened a weekly and was soon feigning deep absorption in an article on salmon fishing, but my thoughts were for ever straying to the figure opposite me. His pipe in his hand, he had not once put it to his lips, but sat with it clenched between his fingers until the white knuckles stood out. His under-lip, drawn between his teeth, seemed strangely red against the grayness of his face.

I KEPT quiet as long as I could, then laid down the article as though I had finished and enjoyed it.

"You ought to take up salmon fishing, Tony. It's as interesting and much more profitable than ghost-stalking."

He turned with a start as though just wakened from a sound sleep.

"Salmon what? Mac, do you remember how Milroy's little dog howled when that

priest of Bhan-Guru tried to stroke her?"

"Oh, forget it!"

"That man must have been a hundred—dried-up skin, bones showing through like a skeleton's, voice like a reed. But his hands were young and powerful—dark black with nails painted blue-green."

"Say, I agreed to stay here, but not to listen to your memoirs. I remember it just as well as you do; you don't have to tell me."

Tony was looking past me. "Remember, how he tried to tell us that the human sacrifice was an ancient custom not used any more, and how Captain Clark knew he was lying because he'd seen the skeleton of a man behind the altar steps, and how later we found twenty or more, with their necks twisted? And you said that the victims probably hadn't suffered because the execution had been done so skilfully. You still think that, don't you, Mac?"

"Heaven knows what I think, except that you're pretty much of an ass."

He straightened up in his chair, his eyes blazing. "You're the ass, damn you! Answer me: they didn't suffer. Tell me they didn't!"

I got up and went over to him, confident now that Tony Henderson was the victim of a mental delusion rather than the unskilful liar I had thought him.

"No," I said slowly, "they didn't suffer. I'm fairly sure of that. Why do you ask?"

He collapsed with a sigh. After a minute he looked up. "Why'd I ask? When you're in danger of death, it helps to know that it won't be painful." He took out his watch and compared his time with mine. "It's eleven twenty-five," with a shudder; "that means forty-two more minutes, Mac. It *is* the sixth of July?"

"As far as I know, unless the whole world's gone as coocoo as you seem to be. Now, look here, Tony, there's absolutely no danger of any kind; even if those priests did want to kill you, just wishing it couldn't do it. They're in Africa; you're in America; there are some five thousand miles of ocean between you."

"Miles! And you're quite ready to sit down any evening and listen to a man singing in London. And when you're told that no wires connect you across the ocean and that you're hearing it just as it's being given and at virtually the same time—that very same voice coming across thousands of miles of emptiness—what do you say? If you remember to marvel at all, you say, 'Science certainly is wonderful.' You don't begin to doubt that you're really hearing anything, do you? You don't question that a voice or picture can be sent through the air from anywhere to you, because scientists say it can be done. You don't know how, you just believe them. They talk about the possibilities of recovering the voices of the past or of sending thought-waves, and you believe them. But I'm telling you what I *know!*"

Unable to answer his arguments with any assurance, I picked up a newspaper and turned to the sports section, hunted in vain for my favorite columnist, and after a brief glance at the other periodicals, looked at my watch.

"It's eighteen minutes of midnight, Tony. What's the program?"

He looked up with a start. "Why, just sit here, I guess."

"I've been thinking, Tony," I said, "that, perhaps, you really did see those hands."

"I did see them, Mac."

"Have you any acquaintances who

might go to some trouble to play a practical joke on you?"

He frowned perplexedly.

"Listen here," I went on. "Ghost-like forms and hands without arms and headless bodies have been used before, you know. Lantern slides make very good connections with the other worlds."

"I would have known a lantern slide."

"You would, would you? Well, personally, I think everything points to it—the vague light that showed up the hands in an otherwise dark room, the fact your own hands passed right through them—everything. It's as clear as daylight."

"But lantern slide pictures don't feel like moth wings when they fall on your throat."

"Moth wings are as faint as imaginary wings. Well, anyway, that's my theory. And that's the one I'm going to test. We'll lock the door, pin the curtains across the window-shades, test the walls for hidden cupboards, move the radio out here——"

As I spoke, I began to carry out my plans of blocking the jokester's chances of repeating. Tony at first refused to budge, but my energy became contagious and presently he went as far as disconnecting the radio, removing it from the room, and coming back with a package of safety pins for the curtains. I knocked on the walls, looked under the sofa, opened the desk top, and moved the bookcase to one side. Satisfied that no man or machinery could get into the room without our knowledge, I put Tony's chair against the wall on the side of the room that had neither door nor window.

"You sit there," I told him, "and don't go moving about. That wall's solid and nothing can get in behind you. I'm going to sit against the door to be sure no key's used."

Tony walked wearily to his place. "Okay, Mac. Just as you say."

It was two minutes before twelve as I sat down with my back to the door. After a minute of inaction, I went to the table, extracted a bit of cotton from the box which held the Eye-stone, carefully replaced the cover, and went back to the door.

"I'm stuffing the keyhole," I said in answer to a question from Tony. "We've got to keep out any points of light."

Satisfied with my job, I put the chair-back under the door-knob to further secure the door. Sitting slightly tipped, I crossed my legs and waited.

"What time's it now?" Tony asked.

I took out my watch and saw by the dim light that it was two minutes after the hour. It did not occur to me to put my hand to the light-switch by the door. As on the previous nights, the change had been so gradual that the half-light seemed the normal thing. Within two minutes it was to be pitch-black and seem as natural.

"Three hundred seconds, Tony."

He began to tap off the seconds with his foot. Subconsciously I counted with him—ninety—ninety-one—ninety-two.

"Say, Mac, are you there?" One hundred and three—one hundred and four. "Mac, did you take the stone out of the box?"

"No. I——"

But the stone was out of the box. From the center of the room came that faint blurred blue-green that had before turned into the form of the eye of the god of death. All my consciousness was focussed on that misty light, but somewhere in another part of my mind I was counting. One hundred and sixty-five—one hundred and sixty-six—one hundred and sixty-seven—one hundred and——

"Mac! Mac!"

I stiffened with a jerk. "It's all right, Tony. I must have left the stone out of the box. That's all it is."

Two hundred and four—two hundred and five—two—— Couldn't he keep his foot still?

"Mac! There's someone in the room! By the table! Mac!"

I felt it, too, then, as a blind man must feel the presence of an alien beside him. I strained my eyes toward the table. Two hundred and twenty-six—two hundred and twenty-seven—two—— The blur of green-blue light merged into the blackness as though a human hand had covered it. Then it appeared again, but this time faintly, for above it were two large mists of light, blue-green, but brighter and more translucent.

"Mac!" Two hundred and forty—two hundred and forty-one—two hundred and forty-two—— "Mac!" They wavered, steadied, then gradually took shape. Black fingers like liquid jet, blue-green nails, lighted by a weird veil of mist.

And still I counted, rhythmically, mechanically, with no will of my own. Two hundred and sixty-nine—two hundred and seventy—two hundred and seventy-one——

"Mac!" They were moving forward slowly, regularly, as though held out by some living man. They were moving toward where Tony Henderson sat in the pitch blackness of the curtained room. Two hundred and eighty-four—two hundred and——

"Mac!"

"Tony, I'm coming! It's all right, Tony!"

I was coming, I told myself fiercely. I had to come, had to get up from my chair and cross the room to Tony. I had to! Two hundred and ninety-three.

I struggled. I put all my strength into that struggle, all my nerve, all my will, but I was bound fast. And it was not by fear but by another's strength pitted against mine.

"I'm coming, Tony!" Nothing could hold me. Two hundred and ninety-eight——

They were there at the far wall, two glowing hands that suddenly moved together.

"My God! Mac!"

Tony's foot had stopped marking the minutes, and the silence seemed more terrible by contrast. I waited in a trance. There was a terrible shriek, and then silence again. The hands of the priest of Nyi had gone.

I was free; I could move. I felt limp as though leather thongs had pressed blood from my veins.

"Tony!" I touched the switch by the door. The room was as it had been. Tony sat against the farther wall, just as when I had last seen him, except that his head was dropped forward as a man's asleep.

"Tony, nothing happened. Nothing could have happened. I tried to come. Damn you, you've got to speak!"

I don't know how long I knelt there trying to awake him, or rather, how long I knelt there telling myself he was alive while knowing beyond all doubt that he was dead.

There were loud and repeated bangs and cries at the door. I had to get help, I told myself. I grabbed the key from the center table. The Eye-stone was not there, I noticed, and the cover was well down on the jeweler's box. Frantically I clawed the cotton from the keyhole. The door was pushed forward from the other side.

There were a great many people at the door. Some held my arms; others rushed inside to Tony.

THE State had a hundred or so witnesses to that quarrel two years before in the lobby of the Metropolitan; it had more than that to testify how I had resented Tony's theft of my book. Even my own lawyers do not believe the truth I tell them about the night that Tony died.

Johnson supported my story at first, but later, when he saw, as the pilot of "Cheeky's" plane had seen, that the truth would brand him liar or accomplice, he, too, changed his "I know" to "I think," and later lied that he had been drinking. Johnson knows that I know he is lying, but I don't blame him. What else could he do?

My lawyers are going to try a plea of self-defense, and, if the worst comes to the worst, of insanity. Strange thing, this having to lie that I killed a man I never touched.

If my release comes before July, I shall study out some way of outwitting the hands. They may not even try to get me. There are two reasons for believing this. First, the stone of Nyi was never found after the night of Tony's death; it is possible that the priests of Bhan-Guru already have it back and will leave me alone. The second reason and the strongest is that there is no way for me to die. The Law said that Captain Clark committed suicide; the Law said that Bobby Milroy died from natural causes; the Law said that "Cheeky" was murdered by person or persons unknown to it; the Law said that Tony Henderson was killed by person and causes known to it. What way is there left for me to go? Fate, perhaps, has outwitted the strangling priests of Nyi, god of death, and will let me live.

* * * * *

July 7, 1930 (by special correspondent): After losing a bitterly fought battle to have the time of his execution changed, L. C. MacKenzie, convicted last May of the murder of his one-time fellow explorer, Anthony Henderson, suffered death by hanging in the prison yard here at seven minutes after midnight this morning. . . .

Haunting Columns

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

The walls of Luxor broke the silver sand
  When stars were golden lepers in the night,
  And, granite monsters in the pallid light,
They lurched like drunken Titans through the land,
With giant strides, most terrible and grand.
  They ringed me when the slender moon was bright,
  And gazing up their cold, inhuman height,
I shrieked and writhed and beat them with my hand.

Then dawn spread far her amaranthine gleam,
  And I could feel my brain to opal turn
That on the iron hinges of the dream
  Shattered to glowing shards that freeze and burn.
    God grant my bones lie silver on the plain
    Ere yet the walls of Luxor come again.

World's End

By HENRY KUTTNER

A weird-scientific tale of travel through Time, and the terrible Black Doom, spawned in the heart of a meteorite, that will menace our descendants

KENNETH BLAKE, struggling into a bulky, ill-fitting garment of black leather, glanced up as old Norwood came into the laboratory. Norwood's gaunt, wrinkled face was set in frowning lines, as it had been ever since Blake had announced that the experiment would take place today. It was odd that Norwood, who would be only a spectator, was worried and afraid, while Blake was only anxious to get into the Time Machine and test the theories which had engrossed him for seven years.

Blake smiled as he brushed back his blond hair with a mittened hand.

"Don't look so miserable, Jep," he said, and raised his eyebrows in mock astonishment. "Good Lord, another gun? You must think I'll have to stand off an army."

The other shrugged his narrow shoulders. "It's as well to be prepared," he said glumly, but put the revolver aside and came forward to help Blake, who was fumbling with the fastenings of a transparent helmet. Impatiently Norwood brushed away Blake's gloved fingers, and the younger man, chuckling, watched deft, lean hands fasten the helmet into place.

Blake touched a stud on his suit. His voice sounded, hollow and metallic.

"Can you hear me, Jep?"

"Yes. The phone's okay—try the heat."

Blake flicked another stud. After a moment he hastily pushed it back to its original position. His face, seen through the transparent helmet, was glistening with perspiration.

"Too hot for comfort."

"You may need it, though, Ken. We can't tell what you'll find—even if the machine works."

"If it works! Of course it'll work." Blake's voice was a little uncertain. Norwood had expressed the fear that had been haunting him for years. He turned away to hide his face from Norwood's searching, faded eyes. If he were to fail now!

No, he wouldn't fail—he couldn't! All the tests had succeeded—all but the final one. Yet on that final test the success of the experiment must depend. Suddenly Blake was impatient. He moved across the room, grotesque in his insulated, electrically heated suit, to the Time Machine.

A raised platform of shining metal, eight feet square, with a shoulder-high railing running along its sides—that was the Time Machine. Only Blake and Norwood knew of the long and bitter years that had gone into its making, the endless experiments and the mighty dreams that had made the creation more to them than a machine. The platform, two feet thick, housed a complicated array of machinery—the fruit of seven years' toil. That was the heart of the machine. From the platform's center a thick pillar jutted up, studded with gages and dials. A bakelite lever protruded from a slot in the column's flat top. Blake's eyes were dreaming as they dwelt on the machine.

And Norwood—strange! At first as enthusiastic as his partner, lately he had grown morose, worried. It was as though

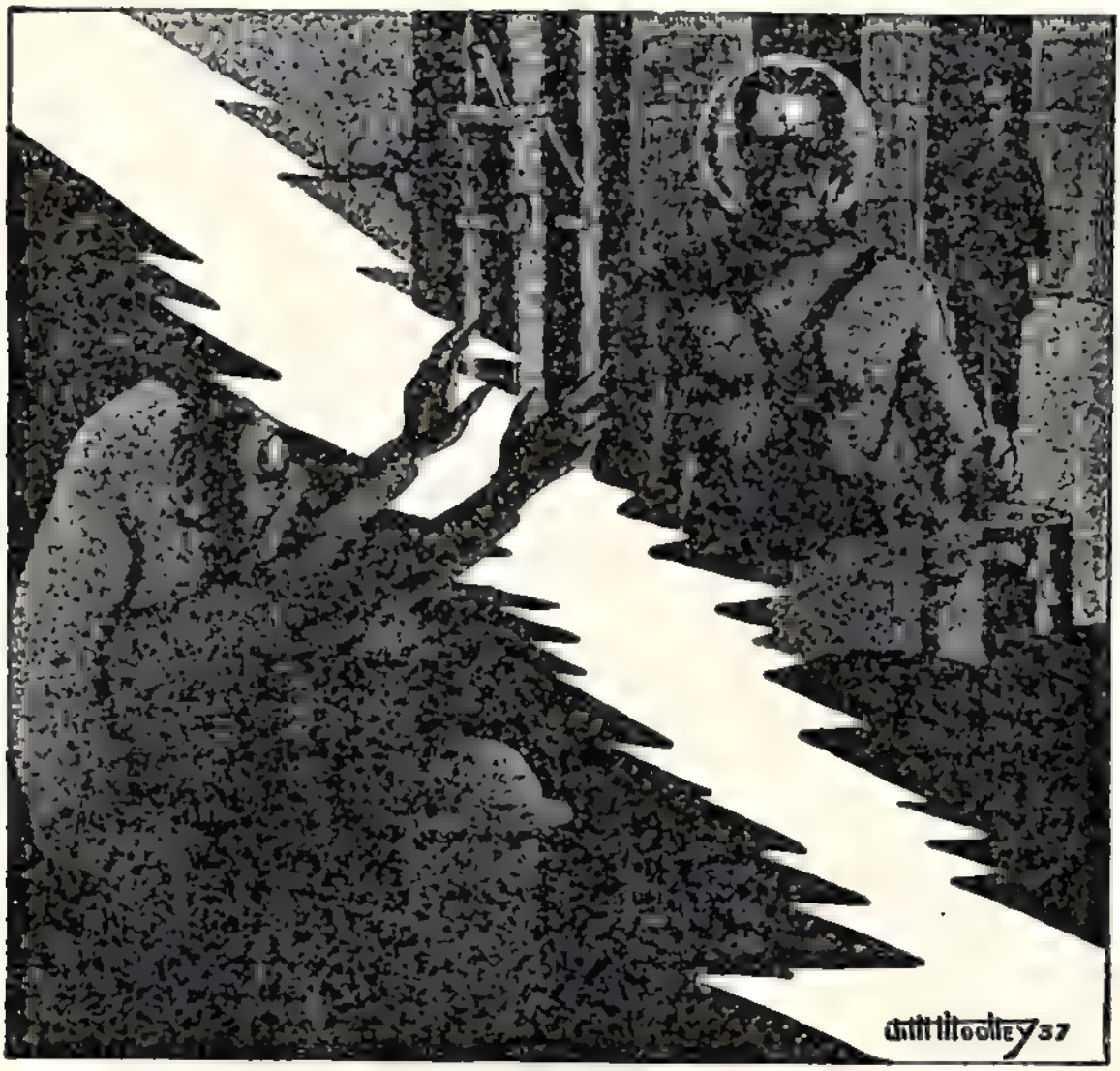
he feared the machine his deft hands and Blake's had created. Sometimes Blake had seen the old man staring at the Time Machine with a brooding dread in his eyes. But Blake himself felt only exhilaration, joyous expectancy at the thought of embarking on the greatest adventure—into time!

Blake ducked under the railing and stood erect on the platform. At his feet was a pile of paraphernalia Norwood had thought he might need—scientific textbooks, a barometer, blankets, tinned food, a large keg of water, and weapons—revolvers, several rifles, and even a submachine gun. Norwood couldn't seem to realize that the machine itself was the best protection against danger—that at the first warning of trouble Blake could put a dozen years between himself and any enemy.

BLAKE stepped to the pillar and knelt, examining the instruments. After a moment he nodded.

"Ready, Jep?" he called.

"Yes—ready," Norwood said gruffly.



"In the cosmic scheme of things, time was meant to be unchangeable."

But Blake did not touch the bakelite lever. He turned to face the old man.

"Think of it, Jep," he said softly. "When I touch that lever I'll go on the greatest adventure man has ever known. I'll be projected into another dimension, while the years and centuries flow past—and then I'll come back into the three-dimensional world in another time! It's as though I could free myself from gravitation and let the earth spin around beneath me. Lord, the wonder of it! I—I'll bring back one of your descendants to visit you, Jep," he finished, somewhat embarrassed by his outburst. But Norwood did not smile.

"I know how you feel, Ken. And——" He hesitated, went on abruptly. "Don't you feel something else, too? That—that man wasn't meant to do this? That in the cosmic scheme of things time was meant to be unchangeable? I feel that, Ken. I—I think we're doing wrong."

Blake stared. "Wrong? Time—unchangeable? Why, we've changed it already! Those models we made—we sent them into time——"

"Into the future, yes. Not the past. Something went wrong there. Why couldn't we send a model *backward* in time?"

"I don't know," Blake said slowly. His face changed. "But I'm going to find out. Get back, Jep!"

His hand closed on the bakelite lever, swung it to the left. Nothing happened.

For a heartbeat there was utter silence. Then Norwood said slowly, "You see, Ken? Something's wrong. According to our calculations you should be in the past now. But you're not. I tell you, man can't transgress against the——"

As he spoke Blake moved the lever, pushing it in the opposite direction. With the abruptness of a thunderclap blackness enveloped him.

Involuntarily his hand released the lever. Then, fearful that he might not be able to find it again in the intense darkness, he fumbled blindly until his fingers closed on the bakelite. He called softly, "Jep!"

Or, at least, his tongue formed the name. But he could hear not the slightest sound. It was as though he had been suddenly struck dumb. He called Norwood's name again, and then shouted it at the top of his voice.

There was no sound.

A surge of exultation leaped up within him. The Time Machine had worked! He had been flung out of three-dimensional space, into an alien dimension in which, apparently, sound could not exist—in which the natural laws might be fantastically warped.

Struck by a sudden thought, he fumbled at his belt, brought up a flashlight. He touched the switch experimentally. The blackness was unbroken. Then—if the flashlight was working—light-vibrations could not exist here.

Panic touched him briefly. How could he read his instruments? For all he knew, he might have already been carried millions of years into the future. Trembling a little, he gripped the flashlight and tapped gently upon the glass that shielded a dial. There was no sound of breaking glass, but presently his fumbling hands touched jagged sharpness. He stripped off a glove and gently touched the needle indicator.

It had not moved, apparently. A mad thought came to him. Suppose time did not exist in this dimension—not time as earth knew it. Or—no, that could not be it. The needle was quivering, as though under the stress of tremendous forces. It had already revolved about its dial, reached its limit—and that limit was approximately a hundred thousand years!

Blind, unreasoning fear gripped Blake as he fumbled for the bakelite lever.

When his fingers closed on it he stood silent for a moment, and then quickly jerked it back. The darkness fell away and was gone.

Instantly angry crimson light lanced into Blake's eyes. He shut them tightly, bringing up his hands in a swift protective gesture before he remembered the shielding helmet. Slowly the pain grew less intense. He opened his eyes, blinking, and stared around.

This was a white world, splashed with crimson. And it was cold—terribly so. Blake switched on the electric heating-coils, but despite them and despite the insulation of his clothing he shuddered with the fearful cold. World of snow, reddened with the rays of a huge, scarlet sun!

Stars glittering icily in a black sky, in which a round red ball hung. The atmosphere must be tenuous, then—but why? After all, a hundred thousand years was only a day in a planet's life. What had brought this untimely death to earth?

An intolerable sense of desolation gripped Blake. Was there no life anywhere on earth? Did the snow blanket lie like a pall from equator to pole? As he wondered he caught a flicker of movement far away, and, remembering that there were binoculars in the heterogeneous pile at his feet, he hastily began to search for them.

But they revealed little. Oddly, it seemed as though the sky, near the horizon, was moving. Little twinkling streaks of light seemed to flicker eerily across the horizon, like fireflies darting across a wall of basalt. How close Blake's simile was to the truth he was soon to learn.

For the horizon marched! Like a sky-towering wall the jewel-streaked blackness rushed toward him, incredibly—alive! It was like a great ramp stretching across the horizon as far as he could see, and inexorably, inevitably, the wall moved toward him. Blake thought of a wave, rushing across the snow.

He took the binoculars from his eyes and involuntarily gasped. The great wall was menacingly close—perhaps thirty miles distant, and apparently hundreds of feet high. Still Blake could not identify it. Smooth, glistening blackness, shot with tiny, darting sparks and streaks of light. And Blake sensed life in the thing—malignant life.

It was rushing toward him with amazing speed, faster than the swiftest airplane. In a few moments now it would reach him, overwhelm him. At the thought Blake's hand went out to the bakelite lever.

But he did not touch it. Amazingly, the scene had changed. The red-splashed snow, the onrushing ramp of blackness, were gone! They had faded and vanished like mist, and in their place had grown another scene, utterly different, utterly—alien.

The platform of the Time Machine rested on a floor of white stone, and far above was a dome roof of the same substance. The circular room was vast—nearly half a mile in diameter, Blake judged. Here and there were curious machines, the purpose of which he could not guess. Save for the machines, the great chamber was empty. The penetrating cold was gone, and Blake switched off the heating-coils in his suit.

A little spot of light began to glow in the air near the platform. Blake stopped to snatch up a revolver, and for a moment his eyes were turned away. When he looked again, a man was standing where the light had been.

A strange man, indeed. Blake's eyes went wide as he stared at the stocky, dwarfed body, the slender hands, with fingers that seemed almost like tentacles—and the astounding head of the being.

At first Blake thought the man was a hunchback, and then he realized that the sack-like object that hung down and rested on the dwarf's back was actually a part of his skull. The head, seen from the front, seemed normal, although the eyes were abnormally large, and the mouth little more than a tiny slit; but the back of the skull was elongated into a two-foot-long cylinder of pulpy white flesh that hung down almost to the floor. And yet that was the logical evolution of the brain-case, Blake realized, for the man's slender neck could scarcely support the weight of a huge, globular cranium. Any misstep would, in such a case, topple the top-heavy head to one side and result in a broken neck. Logical—but fantastic, strange beyond imagination!

The stocky body was clothed in glistening, metallic mesh. One of the slender arms swung up, palm forward, in the immemorial gesture of peace.

Blake thrust the revolver into his belt, but did not relax his wariness. He said, "Who are you?"

As he had expected, the other gave no sign of understanding. A gulf of a hundred thousand years separated the languages of the two. Yet the future-man bridged the gulf in a way that was astounding in its simplicity.

After a pause a voice said, "I am called Nak."

Blake's eyebrows shot up in bewilderment. He had been watching the dwarf's lips, was sure that they had not moved. And, strangely, he could not distinguish the voice's tone—whether it had been flat, shrill, or harsh.

Again the voice, "I am Nak. I am not speaking—not orally. It is my mind you hear."

Blake gasped, "Your *mind?*"

"Yes. Thought-transference — telepathy. The vibrations of my mind impinge upon yours."

"But I *hear* you——"

"No, you do not. That is habit. Your brain transmits my thoughts to the auditory nerves, where they are translated into your tongue. When you speak, your words alone would be gibberish, but I receive the thoughts behind your words as well—and automatically translate them into my own language. Our race has conversed thus for thousands of years."

Blake said, "Are you—a friend?"

"Yes. You are puzzled. Your mind is confused. I can see — you have come through time." There was a flicker of expression on the narrow face, with its great eyes. "From the past . . . but I thought there was never any successful time-projector built."

"I was the first," Blake said, "so far as I know—but that was very long ago."

"The date?"

Blake told him. The other shook his head in a gesture of bewilderment. "In all history there is no record of such a success. Not even when the Doom brought about the Renaissance of Science——"

"The Doom?" Abruptly Blake remembered the marching ramp of blackness. "The—how did I get here? How did you——"

"I transported you here, by means of a physical process I do not think you could understand. It is a matter of warping space—as a sheet of paper can be folded until opposite edges touch. For a moment the Seventh Circle—where you were—and this room were touching, in hyperspace. It was a development of the old radio transmission of matter."

The future-man, Nak, had been eyeing the Time Machine curiously. Now he came forward, fumbling at his belt. Blake retreated a step.

"I mean no harm," the strange telepathic voice said. "Your coming has brought hope to the world—where I am one of a dozen survivors. But—you cannot understand. I must show you. Watch that machine."

He gestured, and Blake stared at a huge machine forty feet distant—a creation of gleaming metal and softly glowing lights. Abruptly the lights flashed out blindingly. Then in the place of the machine was a screen of lambent radiance, oval, twenty feet tall. Shadows crawled across it. They grew clearer. They became—pictures!

A CITY flashed into the foreground, seen from the air—New York, in Blake's day. Yet Blake recognized odd discrepancies—an airplane flew past, and it was an awkward machine of pre-war days. A ship visible in the harbor was an old-fashioned sailing-vessel. The buildings were windowless.

"It is a reconstruction," Nak said. "Histories are not always accurate, especially when dealing with times so remote. Watch."

The scene shifted. There was a glimpse of racing green water. Another city grew —Sydney, Australia, Blake thought. It faded; there was only the white expanse of a sun-parched desert.

Abruptly there was a blinding flash of light—soundless. When it passed Blake saw a great crater, still smoking, gouged out of the desert.

"A meteor," Nak said. "The seed of the Doom."

The scene changed again. Now the desert seemed less arid as though dozens, perhaps hundreds of years, had passed. At the bottom of the crater was visible a little splotch of black. It glittered in the glaring sunlight.

"That is the Doom," Nak said, and there was hatred in his voice. "That entity, from intergalactic space, has wiped out all life from earth—all but a few hundreds. What it is we never discovered—not though we experimented with it for thousands of years. It is alive, but it is matter of an entirely different atomic type from matter that we know. It is not crystalline, nor mineral, nor organic at all —yet it is alive. And it eats. It ingests all matter—stone and sand and water, and even air, are all alike to it. Watch."

On the screen there appeared suddenly a great boulder, on which a tree, rooted in a little cup of soil, grew precariously. Into the picture a finger of blackness crept. It moved forward slowly, engulfing the stone and the tree. They were swallowed in the blackness.

"Earth had nothing that could stop it. It moved outward from the Australian desert—and downward too. Through the centuries it has grown until the solid earth, save for one 'island,' consists of nothing but that substance. Like an infection, it has eaten its way through steel and solid rock. It grew very slowly at first. Then faster and faster—perhaps forty thousand years ago man realized that it was a menace. It had covered only eighty square miles then. Its rate of growth increased tremendously, and there was nothing that could stop it.

"It has eaten earth, all but a small island, where the last remnants of humanity are gathered. In a circle about this central doomed city are the Outposts. This is an Outpost—one of a group of towers scattered about the edge of the island, to battle the Doom."

"You—battle it?" Blake asked.

The other nodded. "Yes. Now that it is too late, we have discovered how to destroy it. Through atomic destruction we disintegrate it — shatter the atoms of which it is composed. But we have so

little power. For a hundred years now we have been losing ground. Our fuel is rapidly becoming exhausted. Soon the Doom will sweep onward unchecked, and man will go for ever.

"I have told you this because it is in your power to save mankind," Nak went on, his voice tense. "For you can move in time, and that——"

A warning throbbing went through the great room. A hidden bell was clanging out a muffled warning. Abruptly Nak swung about, raced to a machine. His slender fingers flickered swiftly over a switchboard.

"Look!" he commanded.

On the oval another picture grew—a great tower, monolithic and huge, set on a plain of empty snow. In the distance a black wall marched. The Doom, sweeping inexorably onward to claim earth for its own.

"The tower—it is the one in which we stand," Nak said.

From the tower's summit a pale finger of light reached out. It swept down, bathing the black ramp. Little flaming sparks flashed and glittered. And suddenly the jet wall was gone.

It had vanished, disappeared into thin air. In its place was a deep gorge, from which boiling vapors seethed up.

"It is annihilated," Nak said quietly. "But it will come again, as it has always come. And eventually the power of the ray will be gone. Then——"

He did not finish. He touched the switchboard, and the picture faded. Again he faced Blake.

"Don't you understand? I have told you this—shown you the Doom—because you can help us."

"Help you?" Blake said hoarsely. "God—if I could! But we had no science compared to yours——"

"You can move in time. If we had known the secret of the annihilating ray when the Doom first came to earth—when the meteor first struck in Australia—we could have destroyed the seed before the infection had a chance to spread."

"And I can take you back in time," Blake interrupted. "That's what you mean, isn't it? I can take you back to the day when the meteor struck, and you can destroy it with your ray! But can I transport the ray——"

NAK brought out a gleaming metal cylinder from his mesh garment. "This projector has sufficient power. The meteor was a small one. You will do it, then?"

"Of course! Get what you need, and we can go—now."

The dwarf smiled. "I need nothing but this projector," he said as he came to the platform. Awkwardly he clambered through the railing.

Blake, his finger on the bakelite lever, hesitated. Nak glanced at him inquiringly. "Is something wrong?"

Blake had remembered the plunge into the other dimension, where physical laws were so strangely altered or suspended. He was not sure, now, that he could find his way back to his own time. He explained the problem to Nak.

The dwarf chuckled. "Can you open this platform—show me the machinery?" he asked.

Blake nodded. He lifted a panel in the metal flooring, and Nak peered down. After a moment he nodded, thrust an arm through the gap, and made a hasty adjustment.

"That will do it," he said. "Simply

move the lever. Your machine is remarkably simple in its construction and theory. I cannot understand why we have no record of successful time-travel."

"Ready?" Blake asked.

The dwarf, clutching the metal cylinder tightly, nodded. Blake moved the lever.

Instantly the dead blackness of the other dimension closed around him. Although he had expected the metamorphosis, he shuddered nevertheless.

"Nak!" he called. "Can you hear me?"

There was no sound. Blake extended a tentative hand, groping in the darkness. But he could not find the dwarf. As he hesitated he felt the bakelite lever move under his hand, snap back into its former position. Light blinded him.

And at that moment a curious darting pain went through Blake's head. He had an utterly indescribable feeling of *change*, as though some strange metamorphosis had taken place within him. Then it was gone.

He heard Jepson Norwood's voice finishing the sentence he had begun when the lever had been moved to fling Blake forward in time. The familiar walls of the laboratory were around him.

"——the laws of nature. They can't be set aside, Ken. And you can see that the machine doesn't work—in the past or the future."

"I can't understand it," Blake heard himself saying. *"It should work, Jep. But—it doesn't."*

"I think I understand why you can't go into the past," Norwood said. "The past can't be changed, and you can't do an impossibility. You can't go back before you existed—or even back a few years or a few minutes, because if you could, you'd remember seeing yourself spring out of empty air on the Time Machine. And you haven't any such memory."

"But the future?" Blake asked. (The strange ache in his head—the odd feeling of something lost — was disappearing.) "Your argument doesn't apply there."

Norwood shook his head. "I don't know. But the universe has its laws, Ken —and they can't be broken."

"The law of compensation," Blake said softly, and then stared at Norwood. "I wonder—could it be possible that I *have* gone into the future—and can't remember it, simply because memories were erased when I returned to a time-sector previous to the time when those memories were recorded on my brain? After all, one can't remember a thing before it's happened. Why"—his eyes were suddenly bright with interest—"I may have gone into the future, brought back someone with me—or tried to and failed, because he couldn't exist in a time prior to his birth! I've the most curious feeling that I *have* forgotten something—something vitally important——"

And then Kenneth Blake shrugged and vaulted the rail of the Time Machine.

"Oh, it's rot, of course, Jep," he said, clapping Norwood affectionately on the shoulder. "It's too fantastic for belief. If I had gone into time I'd have remembered it. We've failed, that's all. Our theories were right, but they didn't work. There may be no such thing as time traveling, after all!"

The Hairy Ones Shall Dance

By GANS T. FIELD

A novel of a hideous, stark horror that struck during a spirit séance—a tale of terror and sudden death, and the frightful thing that laired in the Devil's Croft

The Story Thus Far

TALBOT WILLS, the narrator, has given up a career as a stage magician to study psychic phenomena. Though a skeptic, he is on good terms with Doctor Otto Zoberg, a lecturing expert on spiritism and other occult subjects. Zoberg, seeking to convert him, takes him to an isolated hamlet where a spirit medium of unusual powers is located.

Wills finds the medium an attractive young woman, Susan Gird. A séance is held in the Gird home, where, though all are handcuffed, a strange wolf-like shape moves in the dark. When Susan Gird's father cries out some sort of accusation, the shape springs upon him and rends him to death. The town constable comes to investigate and, inasmuch as Wills is a magician and escape artist, accuses him of the murder.

Wills is confined in a cell. When an angry mob gathers to lynch him, he breaks out, flees through the town and across a snow-covered field toward the Devil's Croft, a mysterious grove which by custom is never entered by the townspeople. As he enters it, he falls, exhausted. Lying thus, he realizes that, though a blizzard is raging outside the grove, inside are leaves, moss, flowers and grass, and that the air is as warm as though it were midsummer.

The story continues:

6. "Eyes of Fire!"

IT PROVES something for human habit and narcotic-dependence that my first action upon rising was to pull out a cigarette and light it.

The match flared briefly upon rich greenness. I might have been in a subtropical swamp. Then the little flame winked out and the only glow was the tip of my cigarette. I gazed upward for a glimpse of the sky, but found only darkness. Leafy branches made a roof over me. My brow felt damp. It was sweat—warm sweat.

I held the coal of the cigarette to my wrist-watch. It seemed to have stopped, and I lifted it to my ear. No ticking—undoubtedly I had jammed it into silence, perhaps at the séance, perhaps during my escape from prison and the mob. The hands pointed to eighteen minutes past eight, and it was certainly much later than that. I wished for the electric torch that I had dropped in the dining-room at Gird's, then was glad I had not brought it to flash my position to possible watchers outside the grove.

Yet the tight cedar hedge and the inner belts of trees and bushes, richly foliaged as they must be, would certainly hide me and any light I might make. I felt considerably stronger in body and will by now, and made shift to walk gropingly toward the center of the timber-clump. Once, stooping to finger the ground on which I walked, I felt not only

This story began in WEIRD TALES for January.

"I felt the impact of solid bone, and the body floundered away."

moss but soft grass. Again, a hanging vine dragged across my face. It was wet, as if from condensed mist, and it bore sweet flowers that showed dimly like little pallid trumpets in the dark.

The frog-like chirping that I had heard when first I fell had been going on without cessation. It was much nearer now, and when I turned in its direction, I saw a little glimmer of water. Two more careful steps, and my foot sank into wet, warm mud. I stooped and put a hand into a tiny stream, almost as warm as the air. The frog, whose home I was disturbing, fell silent once more.

I struck a match, hoping to see a way across. The stream was not more than three feet in width, and it flowed slowly from the interior of the grove. In that direction hung low mists, through which broad leaves gleamed wetly. On my side its brink was fairly clear, but on the other grew lush, dripping bushes. I felt in the stream once more, and found it was little more than a finger deep. Then, holding the end of the match in my fingers, I stooped as low as possible, to see what I could of the nature of the ground beneath the bushes.

The small beam carried far, and I let

myself think of Shakespeare's philosophy anent the candle and the good deed in a naughty world. Then philosophy and Shakespeare flew from my mind, for I saw beneath the bushes the feet of—of what stood behind them.

They were two in number, those feet; but not even at first glimpse did I think they were human. I had an impression of round pedestals and calfless shanks, dark and hairy. They moved as I looked, moved cautiously closer, as if their owner was equally anxious to see me. I dropped the match into the stream and sprang up and back.

No pursuer from the town would have feet like that.

My heart began to pound as it had never pounded during my race for life. I clutched at the low limb of a tree, hoping to tear it loose for a possible weapon of defense; the wood was rotten, and almost crumpled in my grasp.

"Who's there?" I challenged, but most unsteadily and without much menace in my voice. For answer the bushes rustled yet again, and something blacker than they showed itself among them.

I cannot be ashamed to say that I retreated again, farther this time; let him who has had a like experience decide whether to blame me. Feeling my way among the trees, I put several stout stems between me and that lurker by the waterside. They would not fence it off, but might baffle it for a moment. Meanwhile, I heard the water splash. It was wading cautiously through—it was going to follow me.

I found myself standing in a sort of lane, and did not bother until later to wonder how a lane could exist in that grove where no man ever walked. It was a welcome avenue of flight to me, and I went along it at a swift, crouching run. The footing, as everywhere, was damp and mossy, and I made very little noise. Not so my unchancy companion of the brook, for I heard a heavy body crashing among twigs and branches to one side. I began to ask myself, as I hurried, what the beast could be—for I was sure that it was a beast. A dog from some farmhouse, that did not know or understand the law against entering the Devil's Croft? That I had seen only two feet did not preclude two more, I now assured myself, and I would have welcomed a big, friendly dog. Yet I did not know that this one was friendly, and could not bid myself to stop and see.

The lane wound suddenly to the right, and then into a clearing.

Here, too, the branches overhead kept out the snow and the light, but things were visible ever so slightly. I stood as if in a room, earth-floored, trunk-walled, leaf-thatched. And I paused for a breath—it was more damply warm than ever. With that breath came some strange new serenity of spirit, even an amused self-mockery. What had I seen and heard, indeed? I had come into the grove after a terrific hour or so of danger and exertion, and my mind had at once busied itself in building grotesque dangers where no dangers could be. Have another smoke, I said to myself, and get hold of your imagination; already that pursuit-noise you fancied has gone. Alone in the clearing and the dark, I smiled as though to mock myself back into self-confidence. Even this little patch of summer night into which I had blundered from the heart of the blizzard—even it had some good and probably simple explanation. I fished out a cigarette and struck a light.

At that moment I was facing the bosky tunnel from which I had emerged into the open space. My matchlight struck two sparks in that tunnel, two sparks that were pushing stealthily toward me. Eyes of fire!

Cigarette and match fell from my

hands. For one wild half-instant I thought of flight, then knew with a throat-stopping certainty that I must not turn my back on this thing. I planted my feet and clenched by fists.

"Who's there?" I cried, as once before at the side of the brook.

This time I had an answer. It was a hoarse, deep-chested rumble, it might have been a growl or an oath. And a shadow stole out from the lane, straightening up almost within reach of me.

I had seen that silhouette before, misshapen and point-eared, in the dining-room of John Gird.

7. *"Had the Thing Been So Hairy?"*

It did not charge at once, or I might have been killed then, like John Gird, and the writing of this account left to another hand. While it closed cautiously in, I was able to set myself for defense. I also made out some of its details, and hysterically imagined more.

Its hunched back and narrow shoulders gave nothing of weakness to its appearance, suggesting rather an inhuman plenitude of bone and muscle behind. At first it was crouched, as if on all-fours, but then it reared. For all its legs were bent, its great length of body made it considerably taller than I. Upper limbs—I hesitate at calling them arms—sparred questingly at me.

I moved a stride backward, but kept my face to the enemy.

"You killed Gird!" I accused it, in a voice steady enough but rather strained and shrill. "Come on and kill me! I promise you a damned hard bargain of it."

The creature shrank away in turn, as though it understood the words and was momentarily daunted by them. Its head, which I could not make out, sank low before those crooked shoulders and swayed rhythmically like the head of a snake before striking. The rush was coming, and I knew it.

"Come on!" I dared it again. "What are you waiting for? I'm not chained down, like Gird. I'll give you a devil of a fight."

I had my fists up and I feinted, boxer-wise, with a little weaving jerk of the knees. The blot of blackness started violently, ripped out a snarl from somewhere inside it, and sprang at me.

I had an impression of paws flung out and a head twisted sidewise, with long teeth bared to snap at my throat. Probably it meant to clutch my shoulders with its fingers—it had them, I had felt them on my knee at the séance. But I had planned my own campaign in those tense seconds. I slid my left foot forward as the enemy lunged, and my left fist drove for the muzzle. My knuckles barked against the huge, inhuman teeth, and I brought over a roundabout right, with shoulder and hip driving in back of it. The head, slanted as it was, received this right fist high on the brow. I felt the impact of solid bone, and the body floundered away to my left. I broke ground right, turned and raised my hands as before.

"Want any more of the same?" I taunted it, as I would a human antagonist after scoring.

The failure of its attack had been only temporary. My blows had set it off balance, but could hardly have been decisive. I heard a coughing snort, as though the thing's muzzle was bruised, and it quartered around toward me once more. Without warning and with amazing speed it rushed.

I had no time to set myself now. I did try to leap backward, but I was not quick enough. It had me, gripping the lapels of my coat and driving me down and over with its flying weight. I felt the wet

ground spin under my heels, and then it came flying up against my shoulders. Instinctively I had clutched upward at a throat with my right hand, clutched a handful of skin, loose and rankly shaggy. My left, also by instinct, flew backward to break my fall. It closed on something hard, round and smooth.

The rank odor that I had known at the séance was falling around me like a blanket, and the clashing white teeth shoved nearer, nearer. But the rock in my left hand spelled sudden hope. Without trying to roll out from under, I smote with that rock. My clutch on the hairy throat helped me to judge accurately where the head would be. A moment later, and the struggling bulk above me went limp under the impact. Shoving it aside, I scrambled free and gained my feet once more.

The monster lay motionless where I had thrust it from me. Every nerve a-tingle, I stooped. My hand poised the rock for another smashing blow, but there was no sign of fight from the fallen shape. I could hear only a gusty breathing, as of something in stunned pain.

"Lie right where you are, you murdering brute," I cautioned it, my voice ringing exultant as I realized I had won. "If you move, I'll smash your skull in."

My right hand groped in my pocket for a match, struck it on the back of my leg. I bent still closer for a clear look at my enemy.

Had the thing been so hairy? Now, as I gazed, it seemed only sparsely furred. The ears, too, were blunter than I thought, and the muzzle not so——

Why, it was half human! Even as I watched, it was becoming more human still, a sprawled human figure! And, as the fur seemed to vanish in patches, was it clothing I saw, as though through the rents in a bearskin overcoat?

My senses churned in my own head. The fear that had ridden me all night became suddenly unreasoning. I fled as before, this time without a thought of where I was going or what I would do. The forbidden grove, lately so welcome as a refuge, swarmed with evil. I reached the edge of the clearing, glanced back once. The thing I had stricken down was beginning to stir, to get up. I ran from it as from a devil.

Somehow I had come to the stream again, or to another like it. The current moved more swiftly at this point, with a noticeable murmur. As I tried to spring across I landed short, and gasped in sudden pain, for the water was scalding hot. Of such are the waters of hell. . . .

I CANNOT remember my flight through that steaming swamp that might have been a corner of Satan's own park. Somewhere along the way I found a tough, fleshy stem, small enough to rend from its rooting and wield as a club. With it in my hand I paused, with a rather foolish desire to return along my line of retreat for another and decisive encounter with the shaggy being. But what if it would foresee my coming and lie in wait? I knew how swiftly it could spring, how strong was its grasp. Once at close quarters, my club would be useless, and those teeth might find their objective. I cast aside the impulse, that had welled from I know not what primitive core of me, and hurried on.

Evergreens were before me on a sudden, and through them filtered a blast of cold air. The edge of the grove, and beyond it the snow and the open sky, perhaps a resumption of the hunt by the mob; but capture and death at their hands would be clean and welcome compared to——

Feet squelched in the dampness behind me.

I pivoted with a hysterical oath, and swung up my club in readiness to strike.

The great dark outline that had come upon me took one step closer, then paused. I sprang at it, struck and missed as it dodged to one side.

"All right then, let's have it out," I managed to blurt, though my voice was drying up in my throat. "Come on, show your face."

"I'm not here to fight you," a good-natured voice assured me. "Why, I seldom even argue, except with proven friends."

I relaxed a trifle, but did not lower my club. "Who are you?"

"Judge Keith Pursuivant," was the level response, as though I had not just finished trying to kill him. "You must be the young man they're so anxious to hang, back in town. Is that right?"

I made no answer.

"Silence makes admission," the stranger said. "Well, come along to my house. This grove is between it and town, and nobody will bother us for the night, at least."

8. *"A Trick that Almost Killed You."*

When I stepped into the open with Judge Keith Pursuivant, the snow had ceased and a full moon glared through a rip in the clouds, making diamond dust of the sugary drifts. By its light I saw my companion with some degree of plainness—a man of great height and girth, with a wide black hat and a voluminous gray ulster. His face was as round as the moon itself, at least as shiny, and much warmer to look at. A broad bulbous nose and broad bulbous eyes beamed at me, while under a drooping blond mustache a smile seemed to be lurking. Apparently he considered the situation a pleasant one.

"I'm not one of the mob," he informed me reassuringly. "These pastimes of the town do not attract me. I left such things behind when I dropped out of politics and practise—oh, I was active in such things, ten years ago up North—and took up meditation."

"I've heard that you keep to yourself," I told him.

"You heard correctly. My black servant does the shopping and brings me the gossip. Most of the time it bores me, but not today, when I learned about you and the killing of John Gird——"

"And you came looking for me?"

"Of course. By the way, that was a wise impulse, ducking into the Devil's Croft."

But I shuddered, and not with the chill of the outer night. He made a motion for me to come along, and we began tramping through the soft snow toward a distant light under the shadow of a hill. Meanwhile I told him something of my recent adventures, saving for the last my struggle with the monster in the grove.

He heard me through, whistling through his teeth at various points. At the end of my narrative he muttered to himself:

"The hairy ones shall dance——"

"What was that, sir?" I broke in, without much courtesy.

"I was quoting from the prophet Isaiah. He was speaking of ruined Babylon, not a strange transplanted bit of the tropics, but otherwise it falls pat. Suggestive of a demon-festival. 'The hairy ones shall dance there.' "

"Isaiah, you say? I used to be something of a Bible reader, but I'm afraid I don't remember the passage."

He smiled sidewise at me. "But I'm translating direct from the original, Mr. —Wills is the name, eh? The original Hebrew of the prophet Isaiah, whoever he was. The classic-ridden compilers of the King James Version have satyrs dancing, and the prosaic Revised Version offers nothing more startling than goats.

But Isaiah and the rest of the ancient peoples knew that there were 'hairy ones.' Perhaps you encountered one of that interesting breed tonight."

"I don't want to encounter it a second time," I confessed, and again I shuddered.

"That is something we will talk over more fully. What do you think of the Turkish bath accommodations you have just left behind?"

"To tell you the truth, I don't know what to think. Growing green stuff and a tropical temperature, with snow outside——"

He waved the riddle away. "Easily and disappointingly explained, Mr. Wills. Hot springs."

I stopped still, shin-deep in wet snow. "What!" I ejaculated.

"Oh, I've been there many times, in defiance of local custom and law—I'm not a native, you see." Once more his warming smile. "There are at least three springs, and the thick growth of trees makes a natural enclosure, roof and walls, to hold in the damp heat. It's not the only place of its kind in the world, Mr. Wills. But the thing you met there is a trifle more difficult of explanation. Come on home—we'll both feel better when we sit down."

WE FINISHED the journey in half an hour. Judge Pursuivant's house was stoutly made of heavy hewn timbers, somewhat resembling certain lodges I had seen in England. Inside was a large, low-ceilinged room with a hanging oil lamp and a welcome open fire. A fat blond cat came leisurely forward to greet us. Its broad, good-humored face, large eyes and drooping whiskers gave it somewhat of a resemblance to its master.

"Better get your things off," advised the judge. He raised his voice. "William!"

A squat negro with a sensitive brown face appeared from a door at the back of the house.

"Bring in a bathrobe and slippers for this gentleman," ordered Judge Pursuivant, and himself assisted me to take off my muddy jacket. Thankfully I peeled off my other garments, and when the servant appeared with the robe I slid into it with a sigh.

"I'm in your hands, Judge Pursuivant," I said. "If you want to turn me over——"

"I might surrender you to an officer," he interrupted, "but never to a lawless mob. You'd better sit here for a time—and talk to me."

Near the fire was a desk, with an armchair at either side of it. We took seats, and when William returned from disposing of my wet clothes, he brought along a tray with a bottle of whisky, a siphon and some glasses. The judge prepared two drinks and handed one to me. At his insistence, I talked for some time about the séance and the events leading up to it.

"Remarkable," mused Judge Pursuivant. Then his great shrewd eyes studied me. "Don't go to sleep there, Mr. Wills. I know you're tired, but I want to talk lycanthropy."

"Lycanthropy?" I repeated. "You mean the science of the werewolf?" I smiled and shook my head. "I'm afraid I'm no authority, sir. Anyway, this was no witchcraft—it was a bona fide spirit séance, with ectoplasm."

"Hum!" snorted the judge. "Witchcraft, spiritism! Did it ever occur to you that they might be one and the same thing?"

"Inasmuch as I never believed in either of them, it never did occur to me."

Judge Pursuivant finished his drink and wiped his mustache. "Skepticism does not become you too well, Mr. Wills,

if you will pardon my frankness. In any case, you saw something very werewolfish indeed, not an hour ago. Isn't that the truth?"

"It was some kind of a trick," I insisted stubbornly.

"A trick that almost killed you and made you run for your life?"

I shook my head. "I know I saw the thing," I admitted. "I even felt it." My eyes dropped to the bruised knuckles of my right hand. "Yet I was fooled—as a magician, I know all about fooling. There can be no such thing as a werewolf."

"Have a drink," coaxed Judge Pursuivant, exactly as if I had had none yet. With big, deft hands he poured whisky, then soda, into my glass and gave the mixture a stirring shake. "Now then," he continued, sitting back in his chair once more, "the time has come to speak of many things."

He paused, and I, gazing over the rim of that welcome glass, thought how much he looked like a rosy blond walrus.

"I'm going to show you," he announced, "that a man can turn into a beast, and back again."

9. *"To a Terrified Victim He Is Doom Itself."*

HE LEANED toward the bookshelf beside him, pawed for a moment, then laid two sizable volumes on the desk between us.

"If this were a fantasy tale, Mr. Wills," he said with a hint of one of his smiles, "I would place before you an unthinkably rare book—one that offered, in terms too brilliant and compelling for argument, the awful secrets of the universe, past, present and to come."

He paused to polish a pair of pince-nez and to clamp them upon the bridge of his broad nose.

"However," he resumed, "this is reality, sober if uneasy. And I give you, not some forgotten grimoire out of the mystic past, but two works by two recognized and familiar authorities."

I eyed the books. "May I see?"

For answer he thrust one of them, some six hundred pages in dark blue cloth, across the desk and into my hands. "*Thirty Years of Psychical Research,* by the late Charles Richet, French master in the spirit-investigation field," he informed me. "Faithfully and interestingly translated by Stanley De Brath. Published here in America, in 1923."

I took the book and opened it. "I knew Professor Richet, slightly. Years ago, when I was just beginning this sort of thing, I was entertained by him in London. He introduced me to Conan Doyle."

"Then you're probably familiar with his book. Yes? Well, the other," and he took up the second volume, almost as large as the Richet and bound in light buff, "is by Montague Summers, whom I call the premier demonologist of today. He's gathered all the lycanthropy-lore available."

I had read Mr. Summers' *Geography of Witchcraft* and his two essays on the vampire, and I made bold to say so.

"This is a companion volume to them," Judge Pursuivant told me, opening the book. "It is called *The Werewolf.*" He scrutinized the flyleaf. "Published in 1934 — thoroughly modern, you see. Here's a bit of Latin, Mr. Wills: *Intrabunt lupi rapaces in vos, non parcentes gregi.*"

I crinkled my brow in the effort to recall my high school Latin, then began slowly to translate, a word at a time: " 'Enter hungry wolves——' "

"Save that scholarship," Judge Pursuivant broke in. "It's more early Scripture, though not so early as the bit about the hairy ones—vulgate for a passage from

the Acts of the Apostles, twentieth chapter, twenty-ninth verse. 'Ravenous wolves shall enter among you, not sparing the flock.' Apparently that disturbing possibility exists even today."

He leafed through the book. "Do you know," he asked, "that Summers gives literally dozens of instances of lycanthropy, things that are positively known to have happened?"

I took another sip of whisky and water. "Those are only legends, surely."

"They are nothing of the sort!" The judge's eyes protruded even more in his earnestness, and he tapped the pages with an excited forefinger. "There are four excellent cases listed in his chapter on France alone—sworn to, tried and sentenced by courts——"

"But weren't they during the Middle Ages?" I suggested.

He shook his great head. "No, during the Sixteenth Century, the peak of the Renaissance. Oh, don't smile at the age, Mr. Wills. It produced Shakespeare, Bacon, Montaigne, Galileo, Leonardo, Martin Luther; Descartes and Spinoza were its legitimate children, and Voltaire builded upon it. Yet werewolves were known, seen, convicted——"

"Convicted on what grounds?" I interrupted quickly, for I was beginning to reflect his warmth.

For answer he turned more pages. "Here is the full account of the case of Stubbe Peter, or Peter Stumpf," he said. "A contemporary record, telling of Stumpf's career in and out of wolf-form, his capture in the very act of shifting shape, his confession and execution—all near Cologne in the year 1589. Listen."

He read aloud: " 'Witnesses that this is true. Tyse Artyne. William Brewar. Adolf Staedt. George Bores. With divers others that have seen the same.' " Slamming the book shut, he looked up at me, the twinkle coming back into his spectacled eyes. "Well, Mr. Wills? How do those names sound to you?"

"Why, like the names of honest German citizens."

"Exactly. Honest, respectable, solid. And their testimony is hard to pass off with a laugh, even at this distance in time, eh?"

He had almost made me see those witnesses, leather-jerkined and broad-breeched, with heavy jaws and squinting eyes, taking their turn at the quill pen with which they set their names to that bizarre document. "With divers others that have seen the same"—perhaps too frightened to hold pen or make signature. . . .

"Still," I said slowly, "Germany of the Renaissance, the Sixteenth Century; and there have been so many changes since."

"Werewolves have gone out of fashion, you mean? Ah, you admit that they might have existed." He fairly beamed his triumph. "So have beards gone out of fashion, but they will sprout again if we lay down our razors. Let's go at it another way. Let's talk about materialization—ectoplasm — for the moment." He relaxed, and across his great girth his fingertips sought one another. "Suppose you explain, briefly and simply, what ectoplasm is considered to be."

I was turning toward the back of Richet's book. "It's in here, Judge Pursuivant. To be brief and simple, as you say, certain mediums apparently exude an unclassified material called ectoplasm. This, at first light and vaporescent, becomes firm and takes shape, either upon the body of the medium or as a separate and living creature."

"And you don't believe in this phenomenon?" he prompted, with something of insistence.

"I have never said that I didn't," I replied truthfully, "even before my experience of this evening went so far toward

convincing me. But, with the examples I have seen, I felt that true scientific control was lacking. With all their science, most of the investigators trust too greatly."

Judge Pursuivant shook with gentle laughter. "They are doctors for the most part, and this honesty of theirs is a professional failing that makes them look for it in others. You—begging your pardon—are a magician, a professional deceiver, and you expect trickery in all whom you meet. Perhaps a good lawyer with trial experience, with a level head and a sense of competent material evidence for both sides, should attend these séances, eh?"

"You're quite right," I said heartily.

"But, returning to the subject, what else can be said about ectoplasm? That is, if it actually exists."

I had found in Richet's book the passage for which I had been searching. "It says here that bits of ectoplasm have been secured in rare instances, and that some of these have been examined microscopically. There were traces of fatty tissue, bacterial forms and epithelium."

"Ah! Those were the findings of Schrenck-Notzing. A sound man and a brilliant one, hard to corrupt or fool. It makes ectoplasm sound organic, does it not?"

I NODDED agreement, and my head felt heavy, as if full of sober and important matters. "As for me," I went on, "I never have had much chance to examine the stuff. Whenever I get hold of an ectoplasmic hand, it melts like butter."

"They generally do," the judge commented, "or so the reports say. Yet they themselves are firm and strong when they touch or seize."

"Right, sir."

"It's when attacked, or even frightened, as with a camera flashlight, that the ectoplasm vanishes or is reabsorbed?" he prompted further.

"So Richet says here," I agreed once more, "and so I have found."

"Very good. Now," and his manner took on a flavor of the legal, "I shall sum up:

"Ectoplasm is put forth by certain spirit mediums, who are mysteriously adapted for it, under favorable conditions that include darkness, quiet, self-confidence. It takes form, altering the appearance of the medium or making up a separate body. It is firm and strong, but vanishes when attacked or frightened. Right so far, eh?"

"Right," I approved.

"Now, for the word *medium* substitute *wizard*." His grin burst out again, and he began to mix a third round of drinks. "A wizard, having darkness and quiet and being disposed to change shape, exudes a material that gives him a new shape and character. Maybe it is bestial, to match a fierce or desperate spirit within. There may be a shaggy pelt, a sharp muzzle, taloned paws and rending fangs. To a terrified victim he is doom itself. But to a brave adversary, facing and fighting him——"

He flipped his way through Summers' book, as I had with Richet's. "Listen: '. . . the shape of the werewolf will be removed if he be reproached by name as a werewolf, or if again he be thrice addressed by his Christian name, or struck three blows on the forehead with a knife, or that three drops of blood should be drawn.' Do you see the parallels, man? Shouted at, bravely denounced, or slightly wounded, his false beast-substance fades from him." He flung out his hands, as though appealing to a jury. "I marvel nobody ever thought of it before."

"But nothing so contrary to nature has a natural explanation," I objected, and

very idiotic the phrase sounded in my own ears.

He laughed, and I could not blame him. "I'll confound you with another of your own recent experiences. What could seem more contrary to nature than the warmth and greenness of the inside of Devil's Croft? And what is more simply natural than the hot springs that make it possible?"

"Yet, an envelope of bestiality, beast-muzzle on human face, beast-paws on human hands——"

"I can support that by more werewolf-lore. I don't even have to open Summers, everyone has heard the story. A wolf attacks a traveler, who with his sword lops off a paw. The beast howls and flees, and the paw it leaves behind is a human hand."

"That's an old one, in every language."

"Probably because it happened so often. There's your human hand, with the beast-paw forming upon and around it, then vanishing like wounded ectoplasm. Where's the weak point, Wills? Name it, I challenge you."

I felt the glass shake in my hand, and a chilly wind brushed my spine. "There's one point," I made myself say. "You may think it a slender one, even a quibble. But ectoplasms make human forms, not animal."

"How do you know they don't make animal forms?" Judge Pursuivant crowed, leaning forward across the deck. "Because, of the few you've seen and disbelieved, only human faces and bodies showed? My reply is there in your hands. Open Richet's book to page 545, Mr. Wills. Page 545 . . . got it? Now, the passage I marked, about the medium Burgik. Read it aloud."

He sank back into his chair once more, waiting in manifest delight. I found the place, underscored with pencil, and my voice was hoarse as I obediently read:

" 'My trouser leg was strongly pulled and a strange, ill-defined form that seemed to have paws like those of a dog or small monkey climbed on my knee. I could feel its weight, very light, and something like the muzzle of an animal touched my cheek.' "

"There you are, Wills," Judge Pursuivant was crying. "Notice that it happened in Warsaw, close to the heart of the werewolf country. Hmmm, reading that passage made you sweat a bit—remembering what you saw in the Devil's Croft, eh?"

I flung down the book.

"You've done much toward convincing me," I admitted. "I'd rather have the superstitious peasant's belief, though, the one I've always scoffed at."

"Rationalizing the business didn't help, then? It did when I explained the Devil's Croft and the springs."

"But the springs don't chase you with sharp teeth. And, as I was saying, the peasant had a protection that the scientist lacks—trust in his crucifix and his Bible."

"Why shouldn't he have that trust, and why shouldn't you?" Again the judge was rummaging in his book-case. "Those symbols of faith gave him what is needed, a strong heart to drive back the menace, whether it be wolf-demon or ectoplasmic bogy. Here, my friend."

He laid a third book on the desk. It was a Bible, red-edged and leather-backed, worn from much use.

"Have a read at that while you finish your drink," he advised me. "*The Gospel According to St. John* is good, and it's already marked. Play you're a peasant, hunting for comfort."

Like a dutiful child I opened the Bible to where a faded purple ribbon lay between the pages. But already Judge Pursuivant was quoting from memory:

" 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. . . .' "

10. "Blood-lust and Compassion."

IT MAY seem incredible that later in the night I slept like a dead pig; yet I had reason.

First of all there was the weariness that had followed my dangers and exertions; then Judge Pursuivant's whisky and logic combined to reassure me; finally, the leather couch in his study, its surface comfortably hollowed by much reclining thereon, was a sedative in itself. He gave me two quilts, very warm and very light, and left me alone. I did not stir until a rattle of breakfast dishes awakened me.

William, the judge's servant, had carefully brushed my clothes. My shoes also showed free of mud, though they still felt damp and clammy. The judge himself furnished me with a clean shirt and socks, both items very loose upon me, and lent me his razor.

"Some friends of yours called during the night," he told me dryly.

"Friends?"

"Yes, from the town. Five of them, with ropes and guns. They announced very definitely that they intended to decorate the flagpole in the public square with your corpse. There was also some informal talk about drinking your blood. We may have vampires as well as werewolves hereabouts."

I almost cut my lip with the razor. "How did you get rid of them?" I asked quickly. "They must have followed my tracks."

"Lucky there was more snow after we got in," he replied, "and they came here only as a routine check-up. They must have visited every house within miles. Oh, turning them away was easy. I feigned wild enthusiasm for the manhunt, and asked if I couldn't come along."

He smiled reminiscently, his mustache stirring like a rather genial blond snake.

"Then what?" I prompted him, dabbing on more lather.

"Why, they were delighted. I took a rifle and spent a few hours on the trail. You weren't to be found at all, so we returned to town. Excitement reigns there, you can believe."

"What kind of excitement?"

"Blood-lust and compassion. Since Constable O'Bryant is wounded, his younger brother, a strong advocate of your immediate capture and execution, is serving as a volunteer guardian of the peace. He's acting on an old appointment by his brother as deputy, to serve without pay. He told the council—a badly scared group—that he has sent for help to the county seat, but I am sure he did nothing of the kind. Meanwhile, the Croft is surrounded by scouts, who hope to catch you sneaking out of it. And the women of the town are looking after Susan Gird and your friend, the *Herr Doktor.*"

I had finished shaving. "How is Doctor Zoberg?" I inquired through the towel.

"Still pretty badly shaken up. I tried to get in and see him, but it was impossible. I understand he went out for a while, early in the evening, but almost collapsed. Just now he is completely surrounded by cooing old ladies with soup and herb tea. Miss Gird was feeling much better, and talked to me for a while. I'm not really on warm terms with the town, you know; people think it's indecent for me to live out here alone and not give them a chance to gossip about me. So I was pleasurably surprized to get

a kind word from Miss Susan. She told me, very softly for fear someone might overhear, that she hopes you aren't caught. She is sure that you did not kill her father."

We went into his dining-room, where William offered pancakes, fried bacon and the strongest black coffee I ever tasted. In the midst of it all, I put down my fork and faced the judge suddenly. He grinned above his cup.

"Well, Mr. Wills? 'Stung by the splendor of a sudden thought'—all you need is a sensitive hand clasped to your inspired brow."

"You said," I reminded him, "that Susan Gird is sure that I didn't kill her father."

"So I did."

"She told you that herself. She also seemed calm, self-contained, instead of in mourning for——"

"Oh, come, come!" He paused to shift a full half-dozen cakes to his plate and skilfully drenched them with syrup. "That's rather ungrateful of you, Mr. Wills, suspecting her of parricide."

"Did I say that?" I protested, feeling my ears turning bright red.

"You would have if I hadn't broken your sentence in the middle," he accused, and put a generous portion of pancake into his mouth. As he chewed he twinkled at me through his pince-nez, and I felt unaccountably foolish.

"If Susan Gird had truly killed her father," he resumed, after swallowing, "she would be more adroitly theatrical. She would weep, swear vengeance on his murderer, and be glad to hear that someone else had been accused of the crime. She would even invent details to help incriminate that someone else."

"Perhaps she doesn't know that she killed him," I offered.

"Perhaps not. You mean that a new mind, as well as a new body, may invest the werewolf—or ectoplasmic medium—at time of change."

I jerked my head in agreement.

"Then Susan Gird, as she is normally, must be innocent. Come, Mr. Wills! Would you blame poor old Doctor Jekyll for the crimes of his *alter ego,* Mr. Hyde?"

"I wouldn't want to live in the same house with Doctor Jekyll."

Judge Pursuivant burst into a roar of laughter, at which William, bringing fresh supplies from the kitchen, almost dropped his tray. "So romance enters the field of psychic research!" the judge crowed at me.

I stiffened, outraged. "Judge Pursuivant, I certainly did not——"

"I know, you didn't say it, but again I anticipated you. So it's not the thought of her possible unconscious crime, but the chance of comfortable companionship that perplexes you." He stopped laughing suddenly. "I'm sorry, Wills. Forgive me. I shouldn't laugh at this, or indeed at any aspect of the whole very serious business."

I could hardly take real offense at the man who had rescued and sheltered me, and I said so. We finished breakfast, and he sought his overcoat and wide hat.

"I'm off for town again," he announced. "There are one or two points to be settled there, for your safety and my satisfaction. Do you mind being left alone? There's an interesting lot of books in my study. You might like to look at a copy of Dom Calmet's *Dissertations,* if you read French; also a rather slovenly *Wicked Bible,* signed by Pierre De Lancre. J. W. Wickwar, the witchcraft authority, thinks that such a thing does not exist, but I know of two others. Or, if

you feel that you're having enough of demonology in real life, you will find a whole row of light novels, including most of P. G. Wodehouse." He held out his hand in farewell. "William will get you anything you want. There's tobacco and a choice of pipes on my desk. Whisky, too, though you don't look like the sort that drinks before noon."

With that he was gone, and I watched him from the window. He moved sturdily across the bright snow to a shed, slid open its door and entered. Soon there emerged a sedan, old but well-kept, with the judge at the wheel. He drove away down a snow-filled road toward town.

I did not know what to envy most in him, his learning, his assurance or his good-nature. The assurance, I decided once; then it occurred to me that he was in nothing like the awkward position I held. He was only a sympathetic ally—but why was he that, even? I tried to analyze his motives, and could not.

SITTING down in his study, I saw on the desk the Montague Summers book on werewolves. It lay open at page 111, and my eyes lighted at once upon a passage underscored in ink—apparently some time ago, for the mark was beginning to rust a trifle. It included a quotation from *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence,* written by Richard Rowlands in 1605:

". . . *were-wolues* are certaine sorcerers, who hauvin annoynted their bodyes, with an oyntment which they make by the instinct of the deuil; and putting on a certain inchanted girdel, do not only vnto the view of others seeme as wolues, but to their own thinking haue both the shape and the nature of wolues, so long as they weare the said girdel. And they do dispose theselves as uery wolues, in wurrying and killing, and moste of humaine creatures."

This came to the bottom of the page, where someone, undoubtedly Pursuivant, had written: "Ointment and girdle sound as if they might have a scientific explanation," And, in the same script, but smaller, the following notes filled the margin beside:

Possible Werewolf Motivations

I. Involuntary lycanthropy.
   1. Must have blood to drink (connection with vampirism?).
   2. Must have secrecy.
   3. Driven to desperation by contemplating horror of own position.

II. Voluntary lycanthropy.
   1. Will to do evil.
   2. Will to exert power through fear.

III. Contributing factors to becoming werewolf.
   1. Loneliness and dissatisfaction.
   2. Hunger for forbidden foods (human flesh, etc.).
   3. Scorn and hate of fellow men, general or specific.
   4. Occult curiosity.
   5. Simon-pure insanity (Satanist complex).

Are any or all of these traits to be found in werewolf

Find one and ask it.

THAT was quite enough lycanthropy for the present, so far as I was concerned. I drew a book of Mark Twain from the shelf—I seem to remember it as *Tom Sawyer Abroad*—and read all the morning. Noon came, and I was about to ask the judge's negro servant for some lunch, when he appeared in the door of the study.

"Someone with a message, sah," he announced, and drew aside to admit Susan Gird.

I fairly sprang to my feet, dropping my book upon the desk. She advanced slowly into the room, her pale face grave but friendly. I saw that her eyes were darkly circled, and that her cheeks showed gaunt, as if with strain and weariness. She put out a hand, and I took it.

"A message?" I repeated William's words.

"Why, yes." She achieved a smile, and

I was glad to see it, for both our sakes. "Judge Pursuivant got me to one side and said for me to come here. You and I are to talk the thing over."

"You mean, last night?" She nodded, and I asked further, "How did you get here?"

"Your car. I don't drive very well, but I managed."

I asked her to sit down and talk.

She told me that she remembered being in the parlor, with Constable O'Bryant questioning me. At the time she had had difficulty remembering even the beginning of the séance, and it was not until I had been taken away that she came to realize what had happened to her father. That, of course, distressed and distracted her further, and even now the whole experience was wretchedly hazy to her.

"I do recall sitting down with you," she said finally, after I had urged her for the twentieth time to think hard. "You chained me, yes, and Doctor Zoberg. Then yourself. Finally I seemed to float away, as if in a dream. I'm not even sure about how long it was."

"Had the light been out very long?" I asked craftily.

"The light out?" she echoed, patently mystified. "Oh, of course. The light was turned out, naturally. I don't remember, but I suppose you attended to that."

"I asked to try you," I confessed. "I didn't touch the lamp until after you had seemed to drop off to sleep."

She did recall to memory her father's protest at his manacles, and Doctor Zoberg's gentle inquiry if she were ready. That was all.

"How is Doctor Zoberg?" I asked her.

"Not very well, I'm afraid. He was exhausted by the experience, of course, and for a time seemed ready to break down. When the trouble began about you—the crowd gathered at the town hall—he gathered his strength and went out, to see if he could help defend or rescue you. He was gone about an hour and then he returned, bruised about the face. Somebody of the mob had handled him roughly, I think. He's resting at our place now, with a hot compress on his eye."

"Good man!" I applauded. "At least he did his best for me."

She was not finding much pleasure in her memories, however, and I suggested a change of the subject. We had lunch together, egg sandwiches and coffee, then played several hands of casino. Tiring of that, we turned to the books and she read aloud to me from Keats. Never has *The Eve of St. Agnes* sounded better to me. Evening fell, and we were preparing to take yet another meal—a meat pie, which William assured us was one of his culinary triumphs—when the door burst open and Judge Pursuivant came in.

"You've been together all the time?" he asked us at once.

"Why, yes," I said.

"Is that correct, Miss Susan? You've been in the house, every minute?"

"That is right," she seconded me.

"Then," said the judge. "You two are cleared, at last."

He paused, looking from Susan's questioning face to mine, then went on:

"That rending beast-thing in the Croft got another victim, not more than half an hour ago. O'Bryant was feeling better, ready to get back on duty. His deputy-brother, anxious to get hold of Wills first, for glory or vengeance, ventured into the place, just at dusk. He came out in a little while, torn and bitten almost to pieces, and died as he broke clear of the cedar hedge."

The thrilling climax of this story, with the confession and capture of the werewolf, will be told in the exciting chapters that bring the tale to a close in next month's issue. Reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.

From Beyond

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

If Tillinghast was really a madman, then what became of the bodies of the servants whom the police said he had murdered?

HORRIBLE beyond conception was the change which had taken place in my best friend, Crawford Tillinghast. I had not seen him since that day, two months and a half before, when he had told me toward what goal his physical and metaphysical researches were leading; when he had answered my awed and almost frightened remonstrances by driving me from his laboratory and his house in a burst of fanatical rage, I had known that he now remained mostly shut in the attic laboratory with that accursed electrical machine, eating little and excluding even the servants, but I had not thought that a brief period of ten weeks could so alter and disfigure any human creature. It is not pleasant to see a stout man suddenly grown thin, and it is even worse when the baggy skin becomes yellowed or grayed, the eyes sunken, circled, and uncannily glowing, the forehead veined and corrugated, and the hands tremulous and twitching. And if added to this there be a repellent unkemptness; a wild disorder of dress, a bushiness of dark hair white at the roots, and an unchecked growth of white beard on a face once clean-shaven, the cumulative effect is quite shocking. But such was the aspect of Crawford Tillinghast on the night his half-coherent message brought me to his door after my weeks of exile; such was the specter that trembled as it admitted me, candle in hand, and glanced furtively over its shoulder as if fearful of unseen things in the ancient, lonely house set back from Benevolent Street.

That Crawford Tillinghast should ever have studied science and philosophy was a mistake. These things should be left to the frigid and impersonal investigator, for they offer two equally tragic alternatives to the man of feeling and action; despair, if he fail in his quest, and terrors unutterable and unimaginable if he succeed. Tillinghast had once been the prey of failure, solitary and melancholy; but now I knew, with nauseating fears of my own, that he was the prey of success. I had indeed warned him ten weeks before, when he burst forth with his tale of what he felt himself about to discover. He had been flushed and excited then, talking in a high and unnatural, though always pedantic, voice.

"What do we know," he had said, "of the world and the universe about us? Our means of receiving impressions are absurdly few, and our notions of surrounding objects infinitely narrow. We see things only as we are constructed to see them, and can gain no idea of their absolute nature. With five feeble senses we pretend to comprehend the boundlessly complex cosmos; yet other beings with a wider, stronger, or different range of senses might not only see very differently the things we see, but might see and study whole worlds of matter, energy, and life which lie close at hand yet can never be detected with the senses we have. I have always believed that such strange, inaccessible worlds exist at our very elbows, *and now I believe I have found a way to break down the barriers.* I am not joking. Within twenty-four

hours that machine near the table will generate waves acting on unrecognized sense-organs that exist in us as atrophied or rudimentary vestiges. Those waves will open up to us many vistas unknown to man, and several unknown to anything we consider organic life. We shall see that at which dogs howl in the dark, and that at which cats prick up their ears after midnight. We shall see these things, and other things which no breathing creature has yet seen. We shall overleap time, space, and dimensions, and without bodily motion peer to the bottom of creation."

When Tillinghast said these things I remonstrated, for I knew him well enough to be frightened rather than amused; but he was a fanatic, and drove me from the house. Now he was no less a fanatic, but his desire to speak had conquered his resentment, and he had written me imperatively in a hand I could scarcely recognize. As I entered the abode of the friend so suddenly metamorphosed to a shivering gargoyle, I became infected with the terror which seemed stalking in all the shadows. The words and beliefs expressed ten weeks before seemed bodied forth in the darkness beyond the small circle of candlelight, and I sickened at the hollow, altered voice of my host. I wished the servants were about, and did not like it when he said they had all left three days previously. It seemed strange that old Gregory, at least, should desert his master without telling as tried a friend as I. It was he who had given me all the information I had of Tillinghast after I was repulsed in rage.

Yet I soon subordinated all my fears to my growing curiosity and fascination. Just what Crawford Tillinghast now wished of me I could only guess, but that he had some stupendous secret or discovery to impart, I could not doubt. Before I had protested at his unnatural pryings into the unthinkable; now that he had evidently succeeded to some degree I almost shared his spirit, terrible though the cost of victory appeared.

UP THROUGH the dark emptiness of the house I followed the bobbing candle in the hand of this shaking parody on man. The electricity seemed to be turned off, and when I asked my guide he said it was for a definite reason.

"It would be too much . . . I would not dare," he continued to mutter. I especially noted his new habit of muttering, for it was not like him to talk to himself.

We entered the laboratory in the attic, and I observed that detestable electrical machine, glowing with a sickly, sinister violet luminosity. It was connected with a powerful chemical battery, but seemed to be receiving no current; for I recalled that in its experimental stage it had sputtered and purred when in action. In reply to my question Tillinghast mumbled that this permanent glow was not electrical in any sense that I could understand.

He now seated me near the machine, so that it was on my right, and turned a switch somewhere below the crowning cluster of glass bulbs. The usual sputtering began, turned to a whine, and terminated in a drone so soft as to suggest a return to silence. Meanwhile the luminosity increased, waned again, then assumed a pale, outré color or blend of colors which I could neither place nor describe. Tillinghast had been watching me, and noted my puzzled expression.

"Do you know what that is?" he whispered. *"That is ultra-violet."* He chuckled oddly at my surprize. "You thought ultra-violet was invisible, and so it is—but you

can see that and many other invisible things *now*.

"Listen to me! The waves from that thing are waking a thousand sleeping senses in us; senses which we inherit from eons of evolution from the state of detached electrons to the state of organic humanity. I have seen *truth*, and I intend to show it to you. Do you wonder how it will seem? I will tell you."

Here Tillinghast seated himself directly opposite me, blowing out his candle and staring hideously into my eyes.

"Your existing sense-organs—ears first, I think—will pick up many of the impressions, for they are closely connected with the dormant organs. Then there will be others. You have heard of the pineal gland? I laugh at the shallow endocrinologist, fellow-dupe and fellow-parvenu of the Freudian. That gland is the great sense organ of organs—*I have found out.* It is like sight in the end, and transmits visual pictures to the brain. If you are normal, that is the way you ought to get most of it . . . I mean get most of the evidence *from beyond.*"

I looked about the immense attic room with the sloping south wall, dimly lit by rays which the everyday eye cannot see. The far corners were all shadows, and the whole place took on a hazy unreality which obscured its nature and invited the imagination to symbolism and phantasm. During the interval that Tillinghast was silent I fancied myself in some vast and incredible temple of long-dead gods; some vague edifice of innumerable black stone columns reaching up from a floor of damp slabs to a cloudy height beyond the range of my vision.

The picture was very vivid for a while, but gradually gave way to a more horrible conception; that of utter, absolute solitude in infinite, sightless, soundless space. There seemed to be a void, and nothing more, and I felt a childish fear which prompted me to draw from my hip pocket the revolver I always carried after dark since the night I was held up in East Providence. Then, from the farthermost regions of remoteness, the *sound* softly glided into existence. It was infinitely faint, subtly vibrant, and unmistakably musical, but held a quality of surpassing wildness which made its impact feel like a delicate torture of my whole body. I felt sensations like those one feels when accidentally scratching ground glass. Simultaneously there developed something like a cold draft, which apparently swept past me from the direction of the distant sound. As I waited breathlessly I perceived that both sound and wind were increasing; the effect being to give me an odd notion of myself as tied to a pair of rails in the path of a gigantic approaching locomotive.

I began to speak to Tillinghast, and as I did so all the unusual impressions abruptly vanished. I saw only the man, the glowing machine, and the dim apartment. Tillinghast was grinning repulsively at the revolver which I had almost unconsciously drawn, but from his expression I was sure he had seen and heard as much as I, if not a great deal more. I whispered what I had experienced, and he bade me remain as quiet and receptive as possible.

"Don't move," he cautioned, "for in these rays *we are able to be seen as well as to see.* I told you the servants left, but I didn't tell you *how.* It was that thick-witted housekeeper—who turned on the lights downstairs after I had warned her not to, and the wires picked up sympathetic vibrations. It must have been frightful—I could hear the screams up here in spite of all I was seeing and hearing from another direction, and later it was rather awful to find those empty heaps

of clothes around the house. Mrs. Updike's clothes were close to the front hall switch —that's how I know she did it. It got them all. But so long as we don't move we're fairly safe. Remember we're dealing with a hideous world in which we are practically helpless . . . *Keep still!*"

The combined shock of the revelation and of the abrupt command gave me a kind of paralysis, and in my terror my mind again opened to the impressions coming from what Tillinghast called "*beyond.*" I was now in a vortex of sound and motion, with confused pictures before my eyes. I saw the blurred outlines of the room, but from some point in space there seemed to be pouring a seething column of unrecognizable shapes or clouds, penetrating the solid roof at a point ahead and to the right of me. Then I glimpsed the temple-like effect again, but this time the pillars reached up into an aerial ocean of light, which sent down one blinding beam along the path of the cloudy column I had seen before.

After that the scene was almost wholly kaleidoscopic, and in the jumble of sights, sounds, and unidentified sense-impressions I felt that I was about to dissolve or in some way lose the solid form. One definite flash I shall always remember. I seemed for an instant to behold a patch of strange night sky filled with shining, revolving spheres, and as it receded I saw that the glowing suns formed a constellation or galaxy of settled shape; this shape being the distorted face of Crawford Tillinghast. At another time I felt huge animate things brushing past me and occasionally *walking or drifting through my supposedly solid body,* and thought I saw Tillinghast look at them as though his better-trained senses could catch them visually. I recalled what he had said of the pineal gland, and wondered what he saw with this preternatural eye.

Suddenly I myself became possessed of a kind of augmented sight. Over and above the luminous and shadowy chaos arose a picture which, though vague, held the elements of consistency and permanence. It was indeed somewhat familiar, for the unusual part was superimposed upon the usual terrestrial scene much as a cinema view may be thrown upon the painted curtain of a theater. I saw the attic laboratory, the electrical machine, and the unsightly form of Tillinghast opposite me; but of all the space unoccupied by familiar objects not one particle was vacant. Indescribable shapes both alive and otherwise were mixed in disgusting disarray, and close to every known thing were whole worlds of alien, unknown entities. It likewise seemed that all the known things entered into the composition of other unknown things, and vice versa.

Foremost among the living objects were inky, jellyish monstrosities which flabbily quivered in harmony with the vibrations from the machine. They were present in loathsome profusion, and I saw to my horror that they *overlapped;* that they were semi-fluid and capable of passing through one another and through what we know as solids. These things were never still, but seemed ever floating about with some malignant purpose. Sometimes they appeared to devour one another, the attacker launching itself at its victim and instantaneously obliterating the latter from sight. Shudderingly I felt that I knew what had obliterated the unfortunate servants, and could not exclude the things from my mind as I strove to observe other properties of the newly visible world that lies unseen around us. But Tillinghast had been watching me, and was speaking.

"You see them? You see them? You see the things that float and flop about you and through you every moment of your life? You see the creatures that form what men call the pure air and the blue sky? Have I not succeeded in breaking down the barrier; have I not shown you worlds that no other living men have seen?"

I heard his scream through the horrible chaos, and looked at the wild face thrust so offensively close to mine. His eyes were pits of flame, and they glared at me with what I now saw was overwhelming hatred. The machine droned detestably.

"You think those floundering things wiped out the servants? Fool, they are harmless! But the servants *are* gone, aren't they? You tried to stop me; you discouraged me when I needed every drop of encouragement I could get; you were afraid of the cosmic truth, you damned coward, but now I've got you! What swept up the servants? What made them scream so loud? . . . Don't know, eh? You'll know soon enough. Look at me—listen to what I say—do you suppose there are really any such things as time and magnitude? Do you fancy there are such things as form or matter? I tell you, I have struck depths that your little brain can't picture. I have seen beyond the bounds of infinity and drawn down demons from the stars. . . . I have harnessed the shadows that stride from world to world to sow death and madness . . . space belongs to me, do you hear? Things are hunting me now—the things that devour and dissolve—but I know how to elude them. It is you they will get, as they got the servants. . . .

"Stirring, dear sir? I told you it was dangerous to move; I have saved you so far by telling you to keep still—saved you to see more sights and to listen to me. If you had moved, they would have been at you long ago. Don't worry, they won't *hurt* you. They didn't hurt the servants—it was the *seeing* that made the poor devils scream so. My pets are not pretty, for they come out of places where esthetic standards are—*very different*. Disintegration is quite painless, I assure you—*but I want you to see them*. I almost saw them, but I knew how to stop.

"You are not curious? I always knew you were no scientist. Trembling, eh? Trembling with anxiety to see the ultimate things I have discovered? Why don't you move, then? Tired? Well, don't worry, my friend, *for they are coming*. . . . Look, look, curse you, look . . . it's just over your left shoulder . . ."

WHAT remains to be told is very brief, and may be familiar to you from the newspaper accounts. The police heard a shot in the old Tillinghast house and found us there—Tillinghast dead and me unconscious. They arrested me because the revolver was in my hand, but released me in three hours, after they found that it was apoplexy which had finished Tillinghast and saw that my shot had been directed at the noxious machine which now lay hopelessly shattered on the laboratory floor. I did not tell very much of what I had seen, for I feared the coroner would be skeptical; but from the evasive outline I did give, the doctor told me that I had undoubtedly been hypnotized by the vindictive and homicidal madman.

I wish I could believe that doctor. It would help my shaky nerves if I could dismiss what I now have to think of the air and the sky about and above me. I never feel alone or comfortable, and a hideous sense of pursuit sometimes comes chillingly on me when I am weary. What prevents me from believing the doctor is this one simple fact—that the police never found the bodies of those servants whom they say Crawford Tillinghast murdered.

The Piper From Bhutan

By DAVID BERNARD

An eery wailing floated from the pipe in the wizened old piper's hands, and suddenly the corpse on the slab—but read the story for yourself

I REGRET, gentlemen, the trouble I have caused; but I'm deeply grateful for this chance to tell my side of the story. And I believe I can show you that, despite the bitter remarks by Professor Du Bois, my action does not warrant my expulsion from this college.

I've studied psychology under Professor Du Bois for four years; my record and the testimony of my classmates will prove that, prior to the experiment the other night, my relationship with Professor Du Bois was mutually satisfactory. I say now, as I've said, that he's intellectually dishonest and untrue to the spirit of experimental science. The truth, gentlemen, is no insult.

It started with the wizened old man from Bhutan. He came to the college with delegates from some mystic society. He could play music, so they told Professor Du Bois, that could restore vitality to the recently dead, keeping them alive until he stopped playing on his pipe. I was working in the laboratory with Professor Du Bois; he told the delegates he was busy.

"Besides," he said, "I have tested at least a dozen individuals with similar claims in the past and unfailingly showed them up as frauds or clever hypnotists. The thing is just physiologically impossible; when you're dead, as the old saying goes. . . . Good day, my friends."

Well, I won't repeat what the mystics said, but they left in a huff, taking the shriveled little man, in his outlandish costume, with them. And soon after we were again disturbed by a visit. It was the professor's brother-in-law, Detective-Lieutenant Crane, and he had bad news about Richford Mason, a friend of Professor Du Bois.

"Mason died early this morning," Lieutenant Crane said, "snuffed out by an overdose of morphine given to him as medicine." Then he went on to tell the shocked professor that Mason's partner, Rumster, was being held. "We know he's guilty as hell, but he's got enough of an alibi to beat conviction if we bring him to trial—unless we can break him."

And that, gentlemen, is how the experiment started: Professor Du Bois to demonstrate the power of suggestion, his special field in psychology; Lieutenant Crane to "break" a confession.

The professor called the mystic society, saying he had decided to give the old Bhutanese piper a scientific test. They apologized for calling him a closed-minded bigot, and other choice epithets, and said they'd give him all the space he wanted in the next issue of their magazine to report his findings. They, of course, had already "proven" the piper's magical ability to their complete satisfaction. They were disappointed when the professor said they couldn't have representation at the experiment, but after all, scientific recognition is scientific recognition.

Well, gentlemen, I accompanied the professor, Lieutenant Crane, and the little

old piper to the home of a radio impersonator, who had known the late Richford Mason. Professor Du Bois planned everything. He spoke to the radio artist, with the latter imitating Richford Mason's voice, while the Bhutanese played away on his pipe and Lieutenant Crane and I worked with a phonographic machine, making records.

The piper took it all deadly seriously, though he kept jabbering in his Tibetan or Chinese dialect, asking, I'm sure, where the dead body was. His music, well—you can't hear it now, for which I'm terribly sorry—but what music!

It wailed, seemed to be talking, pleading, in a weird melancholy voice that somehow seemed to beat right through you. No melody, as we know the term, just a haunting, lilting strain, like nothing I've ever heard before—or hope again to hear!

At Professor Du Bois' direction, we made two excellent recordings, and in a few hours everything was ready.

In a secluded house at the end of town, the accused Rumster was made the subject of the experiment. We had the corpse of Richford Mason in one room; in another, the Bhutanese piper. In the room where the lieutenant, the professor and I sat with Rumster were the two records.

One was on a phonograph on the table. The other was on a phonograph hidden behind the sofa. This hidden machine had a catch protruding just a sixteenth of an inch from the corner of the rug. A tug with your shoe-tip would set off the record.

Well, first Lieutenant Crane gave Rumster the third degree; but no use. He looked guilty, his voice sounded guilty, and his story had a few frayed edges—but he denied the crime while admitting he had the best motive for it.

Then Professor Du Bois, introduced to the accused as a friend of the late Richford Mason, went to work. It made me laugh sardonically to hear the professor build up a case for "the subtle revivifying effects of music, that is, the vibrations we call music."

In his book, *Backgrounds of Psychology,* Professor Du Bois calls the ancients "misguided and misguiding interpreters of natural phenomena, with no just claim whatsoever to science." But to Rumster he said:

"The wise men of the ancient world, Asclepiades and Pythagoras, taught and demonstrated the profound effect of music upon the body. The sages of Egypt, indeed, went so far as to bring life to the dead, so it is reliably reported." He went on and on, citing the reports of travelers in the orient, and after that sank in, he mentioned the Bhutanese piper.

"One wise old man, who has astounded observers by his ability to infuse life into the recently dead with the magical music of his pipe, has been brought to this country." And he showed Rumster clippings from the sensational press, which of course had been inspired by the unscientific "experiments" of the mystic society.

Well, as the professor kept on, Rumster scoffed, but he was getting uneasy, perspiring, wondering. Then Professor Du Bois said, "Last night, after hearing of the marvelous success of this piper from Bhutan, we brought him to the bier of Richford Mason—to try him out——"

"And it worked!" Lieutenant Crane cut in.

"It worked?" Rumster yelled, and Lieutenant Crane growled:

"Yeah! That's what I said, and we got his word that you did it, murdered him!"

While Rumster chafed and squirmed,

the lieutenant calmly fished a typed confession from his pocket and gave it to Rumster to sign. But Rumster whimpered, "You can't f-fool me like that."

"This is no joke, Rumster," Professor Du Bois said very gravely. "We made a phonographic recording of what happened last night, when the strange music of the Bhutanese piper lured the soul of Richford Mason, your late partner, back to his dead body. I know, Rumster, I spoke to Mason!"

One thing I can't take away from Professor Du Bois; he is a master of suggestion, and he demonstrated it that night. Rumster forced a laugh, but fooled nobody. He was scared; still he would not sign the confession.

At Professor Du Bois' signal, I walked to the phonograph on the table; and after a few more questions, the professor said, "Go ahead."

You should have seen Rumster's eyes pop as the record started. The music started faintly, the piping gaining strength and abruptly breaking into a wild interblending of notes and octaves utterly bewildering in its harmony. Over and over the haunting music repeated, sad, wailing, mysteriously appealing—and then a new note lilted into it, and the music faded off a bit and suddenly there sounded—a voice!

Hollow, throaty, the groan of one awakening uneasily from deep slumber. Sonorously it spoke:

"Who calls me? Why do you wake me? What do you want?"

"M-Mason!" Rumster wheezed. And from the phonograph came the voice of Professor Du Bois, quivering:

"It is I, John Du Bois."

"Oh," came the monotonously dull voice, "why am I called back?"

"A matter of justice, Richford. A question to ask."

Then silence, save for the weird wail of the pipe.

Again the voice of Du Bois:

"Please, Richford, do not sleep, just for a while. Please. Do you hear me?"

"I do. I hear you. But this pains. . . . What do you want?"

"Tell me—who killed you?"

"I am not dead."

"I know——"

"You do not know. Not until you are where I now am will you know. Now I know the meaning of what men fear. Merely the body——"

"Yes, Richford, who killed your body?"

"Him I pity, not hate. What a fool! Did he know what I now know, what I now see, never would he have done it. But here all things are clear; into the innermost heart and thoughts of those left behind does one see, and I know the anguish and torture that possess his guilt-burdened soul——"

"Who, Richford, who was it?"

"Rumster, Marvin Rumster. The moment I took that medicine he mixed for me, I knew. For my cough, he said. That terrible choking cough; but now, of all that I am now free——"

The record ended abruptly. I halted the machine, and Lieutenant Crane pushed the confession into Rumster's lap. I got a wink from Professor Du Bois because it was certain that Rumster couldn't stand much more. He sighed and gulped and played with the confession, but at length he stiffened and started denying all over again.

"I didn't, I didn't, I didn't, I tell you!"

Lieutenant Crane came back at him: "All right, then, you tell that to *him*. We didn't want to hurt him, but I see we got to do it."

That was the cue for Professor Du Bois' ace. The lieutenant and I wheeled the cadaver into the room, right next to

the gaping Rumster. That worked on him for several minutes, and after we gave him smelling-salts, and he still weakly refused to sign, Professor Du Bois brought the Bhutanese piper into the room.

The wizened old man's eyes lit up when he saw the corpse; he tuned up his pipe with several sharp squeaks and waited eagerly for the signal from Professor Du Bois.

"Ready?" the lieutenant rapped at Rumster, gripping him by the collar to keep him from turning away from the corpse.

That was my cue. I sidled over to the corner, so that catch just barely protruding from the rug would be in easy reach of my toe, to set the second record going.

"Ready?" repeated the lieutenant, shaking Rumster."

"Wh-what f-for?"

"To talk to Mason, as soon as he comes back. To tell him——"

Rumster cried that he couldn't, wouldn't.

"All right, then, sign that confession!"

I had the idea that Rumster sobbed out "Yes!" But Lieutenant Crane nodded to the professor and the professor signaled to the Bhutanese, who proceeded to fill the room with his eery music. Low, weirdly wailing, precisely as on the first record, it gained strength slowly, somehow beating through you, gripping you. Fascinated, I stared at Rumster's blood-drained, open-mouthed face. I saw him gain control of himself abruptly, leaping a full yard off the sofa, bolting madly for the door.

Screaming, "Let me out!" he was collared at the door by Lieutenant Crane. And he signed the confession there, scribbling his name as if his life depended on it, and was pushed out, into the arms of a waiting detective.

I saw Professor Du Bois walk toward the grinning lieutenant, while the Bhutanese wailed away—and with startling suddenness, there broke into the weird strain—a voice!

The voice of Richford Mason, groaning ghastlily! Horrified, I whirled on the corpse. And as God is my judge, gentlemen—the explanations and skeptical remarks of Professor Du Bois to the contrary—I swear I saw those thin blue lips part, the eyelids of that yellowish waxy face flutter.

Maybe I did go temporarily berserk, but, what I saw—and heard—I rushed headlong for that piper, bore him into the sofa, ripping the pipe away from his mouth and smashing it over my knee.

The professor and the lieutenant grabbed me, crying out if I had gone stark crazy. I yelled out what had happened.

"Why," the professor said, while the lieutenant guffawed, "you yourself set the record going."

I fell back when he said that, for the second record was designed just that way; but then I fairly leaped at him, telling him the truth, gentlemen:

"In my excitement, I completely forgot to tug the catch!"

Professor Du Bois' face went pale at that. He stooped behind the sofa, examining the phonograph. He emerged with the record in his hand.

"You're wrong, dead wrong," he said slowly, huskily. A look a little bit like fright was on his face. "You *did* set this record off. That voice we . . . you heard was from the record."

"Why sure," Lieutenant Crane put in, "only a guy as guilty as Rumster would believe this music humbug. When you're dead——"

But I looked down at the catch protruding from the rug. Not a centimeter

more than the sixteenth of an inch at which it had originally been fixed was it protruding.

The professor laughed when I showed that to him; and he laughed again when I asked him why he hadn't shown the record to me to prove I was wrong instead of so hurriedly taking it from the hidden phonograph. Then I asked him why the ghastly groaning had stopped precisely when I ripped that pipe from the Bhutanese; and he called me a gullible, sophomoric fool.

"When you threw the old man into the sofa the impact jarred the phonograph, halting the record."

That forced upon me how the mind of a scientist, no less than the zealous religionist's, can become grooved and open only to orthodoxy. But as I turned angrily to leave, I saw one more thing. And what I saw, coupled with the furious outburst I got from Professor Du Bois when I mentioned it, made me fly off the handle and tell the professor the strong but true words for which he now would have me expelled.

I saw the arms of Richford Mason, the lifeless arms which had been folded across his chest in a posture of serene repose—I saw them hanging limply, almost trailing to the floor from the sides of the table bed.

Ally of Stars

By IRENE WILDE

From Time's disintegrating wall
I watched the regiments of moons
March down the avenue of night,
The flying columns and platoons
Of suns receding disappear
Beyond horizons of sound and sight;
I heard the systems, world on world,
Down battlements of darkness hurled,
And saw the spheres in bright parade
Demolished by the cavalcade
Of doom, the nebulæ undone,
The constellations' slow retreat,
The meteor's swift oblivion . . .
I watched from Time's low crumbling wall;
I know their passwords and their signs—
In uniform of yielding breath,
Ally of stars, I write these lines
Above the signature of Death!

The Passing of Van Mitten*

By CLAUDE FARRÈRE

The story of a man who passed through the death agony, to learn—what?

WHEN the priest had administered extreme unction, he went away. Van Mitten had only a short time to live, there was not the slightest doubt about that. There was no one in the room with him now but the old nurse. The poor woman, who had been on a strain for days, had fallen sound asleep in her chair. Strangely enough, although the end was so near at hand, Van Mitten was completely and lucidly conscious. He was not suffering in the slightest. His life was ebbing away, that was all. He was an old man, and his vital forces were dying out. He had lived life to the full, for as long as his physique had been able to carry him. The machine was worn out, and in a few hours or minutes the wheels would cease turning.

The dying man's eyes wandered about the room. He had spent many a night within these four walls. Twenty thousand perhaps, or thirty thousand. He tried to calculate, but what was left of his mind was too feeble. His yellowish hands lay side by side on the counterpane. He tried to cross them on his breast, but that was a task completely beyond his strength. For all practical purposes, he was dead already. There was nothing to do but lie there and wait. Wait and think.

Death.—The thing was certainly much less terrible than he had supposed it would be. He had been afaid of it in the past, very much afraid of it. Now, now that he was coming face to face with it, the bugaboo did not seem so frightful, after all. A very small thing, to be sure. The mountain was bringing forth a mouse, as had happened so often in the course of his life. He did not feel the slightest fear of it, only curiosity. So this much-discussed hour was about to strike for him, very shortly. And after it struck —what then? There was certainly something more! Annihilation? Or another life?

He had not devoted a great deal of time to speculation during all the years of his long life. Van Mitten had never been what is called a religious man, but neither had he been what is called an atheist. He had been one of those men who take things as they come—who don't understand about the eternal matters, and who make no particular effort to do so. But the moment had come when the eternal matters had to be faced. Evasion was possible no longer. What would happen to him next. Where would he go, what would he be, after he had passed the experience called death?

"I haven't the slightest idea," he said to himself, as he lay perfectly motionless, unable even to open his lips. "I don't know, and nobody knows, and no living person has ever known. But I shall know very soon—I shall know what no living person has ever known!" But at no

* Translated by Roy Temple House from the French.

moment in all the period of waiting, he was sure of it, had there been the slightest sensation of fear. Van Mitten wondered at this, passively and coolly. Then he wondered at another thing—at a strange, regularly recurring sound which had suddenly penetrated his consciousness, and which seemed to be somewhere very near him.

He thought: "What extraordinary rhythm is this?"

But in a moment he understood. The sound was in his own body. It was in his own throat, in his own breathing. It was a phenomenon which he had read about, which he had even heard once or twice before, himself. It was the death-rattle.

"Well now!" he thought calmly. "So the death-agony has begun?"

The more he thought of it, the more surprized he was. He had supposed that the death-agony was invariably something very painful. But search through his consciousness as he might, he could not discover that he was suffering in the slightest.

In the meantime, the old nurse had awakened. Several other persons had come in—relatives and friends. The little bedroom was crowded with them. The dying man was still able to see, but he saw everything and everybody with perfect unruffled indifference. He was not clear about who all these visitors were. A sort of fog seemed to be coming over his vision. But he had no particular desire to recognize any of them. In this last moment of life, he was interested only in himself. One curious question held all his feeble attention, to the exclusion of all other thoughts and feelings: What was coming to him next? Nothing? Something? What?

His lips made a vague effort to frame the assurance, for himself alone:

"I shall know very soon—I shall know certainly—I shall know everything—*everything*——"

But the only visible and audible effect of his effort was an increase in the violence of the death-rattle. Someone who stood beside him murmured:

"Ah, how he is suffering!"

Van Mitten heard the words and would have been glad to make a sign that the speaker was mistaken; but he had not the power to move a muscle. His eyes grew dimmer and dimmer. And he noticed that his hearing was dulling.

Some time passed. Minutes. Many minutes. The dying man no longer saw anything at all, no longer heard anything. Then he had the sensation that he had made an entirely involuntary motion; it seemed to him that his hands had stirred as if to draw the bed-clothing up toward his face. His thoughts were full of confusion, but he remembered one thing distinctly:

"Ah, yes! my hands lay on the counterpane—in front of me——"

He felt a resurgence of curiosity, and he began again to study his sensations and emotions. No, there was no doubt about it; he was not afraid. But his interest in his situation, in spite of the tenuous and as it were muted condition of his thinking faculties, seemed to grow keener and keener, as he felt that he was approaching nearer and nearer—it could only be a matter of seconds now—to the supreme moment. It was all very strange, almost unbelievable. For a moment, he felt a flash of incredulity that it could be he, and not someone else, that lay here on this bed, on the point of passing out of life. Well, his life had had a beginning, and it had to have an ending—that was logical, wasn't it?—Logical? *Was* it logical, after all?—Perhaps it wasn't so inevitable!—Was it true that his life had

had a beginning? What did he know about it?

He was conscious that someone had held a mirror in front of his mouth. Someone, the physician no doubt, said solemnly:

"He's gone!"

And Van Mitten knew that the person was right. He knew that an eternally valid change had taken place, that he was now what men call dead. He said to himself—and he realized perfectly well that he no longer had any voice, any lips, to say it with—he repeated to himself: "Now I shall know! Now I shall know everything!" But he was filled with an immense astonishment to discover that he did *not* know. He did not know anything at all! Death had torn away no veil. The mystery of things remained intact, impenetrable—just as it had been before!

He was bewildered, baffled, helpless with perplexity.

"What is this?" he said to himself. "What is this?—I am dead. There is no doubt about that. I am completely, thoroughly, irrevocably dead. I am not annihilated—I am still *I*, just the same—I still have being, I am immortal—but what a strange sort of being it is! I can't see, I can't hear, I can't feel, I can't remember.—What is this, what is this?" What am I?—What was I? Where did I come from?"

He was plunged into an ocean of ignorance. He tried hard to think, he had the power of effort and he made use of that power, he seemed to himself like a bird fluttering against the bars of his cage. Then it seemed to him that he saw the reason for his helplessness.

"My memory—my memory was left behind—so of course—well, even if *it* is gone, I am still a person, I am still myself."

Now he realized that it was impossible, that his speculations could arrive nowhere. He surrendered, completely. He understood that it could not be otherwise. His memory belonged to his past, to his completely separate past, his past which was in no sense he any longer. He should never be able to remember his past life, he should never be able to know that he had been something before, something different—a thing, even a person—in the past that was past for ever and ever.

All of a sudden he discovered that he was very, very tired. He relaxed and let himself sink, physically as well as mentally. And under him, he had a confused feeling that springs were yielding, the springs of a soft bed. Was he dead no longer? Dead? What did the word mean? Nothing, nothing at all. He reached out his hands—by what miracle did he have hands, and could he thrust them out?—he felt clumsily of smooth, braided willow work, to the right, to the left, braided osier walls—he tried to speak, but could not—he had no words—he had no thoughts, even—he could remember nothing—he knew nothing—it was all strange to him, all new, prodigiously new and difficult.

Yet he had a voice. He could make a sound. His voice sounded like:

"Wah! . . . wah! . . . wah!"

Someone came to him. A voice called, hopeful, troubled:

"Is he all right? I thought I heard him crying."

And another voice replied:

"He's hungry, that's what's the matter with him! He's fit as a fiddle, bless his heart! I'll bring him to you so he can get his dinner!"

And the person who had been Van Mitten, who had grown old and died and been born again, sucked down his fill of mother's milk and went to sleep again.

The Ghosts at Haddon-le-Green

By ALFRED I. TOOKE

A graveyard tale that sounds suspiciously like verse

THE Bishop was poking the library fire. His wife had gone out for a walk, when the Vicar dropped in, and expressed a desire to have a most serious talk. It seemed that a story was floating about, that the churchyard was haunted at night. The Vicar had heard it from Absalom Prout, who'd had a most terrible fright, and swore he had seen, by the light of the moon, some specters cavorting around; while old Mrs. Mortimer-Bryce in a swoon by the gate of the churchyard was found, and later declared she was sure she had seen some ghosts at their midnightly revels; though several people of Haddon-le-Green quite loudly averred they were devils.

The Bishop was shocked as the story he heard, absorbing it *cum grano salis;* then muttered: "Ghosts? Devils? The thing is absurd! Some crank giving vent to his malice, or else some preposterous prank it must be, or somebody's idea of humor. Let's go to the churchyard. Perhaps we shall see what caused this ridiculous rumor!" And so, through the darkness, the two of them strolled, discussing the Curate—a new one; a rather frail chap, who by someone was told he should have a mustache—so he grew one! Thus talking, their way to the churchyard they sought, and opened the gate and went in, and sat on a blanket the Bishop had brought, discussing original sin.

The Bishop, orating, his mission forgot, and glibly expounded his views. The Vicar picked out a less bumpier spot, and gently fell into a snooze, till the Bishop's long discourse ran suddenly dry. The Vicar awoke, and felt queer. The Bishop leaped up, with a muttered: "Oh, my!" The Vicar responded: "Dear, dear!" For up from behind a new tombstone there loomed a shape that made both of them cower; and just at that instant above them there boomed twelve strokes from the clock in the tower.

Right over the tombstone the visitant hopped, and in the dim light they observed a piece of a shroud that about it still flopped, and both were extremely unnerved. The Bishop was portly; the Bishop was stout, with a wobble in both of his knees. The Vicar was prone to attacks of the gout—yet each ran with remarkable ease. They didn't go round by the gate, but, instead, they climbed o'er the wall, which was quicker. The Vicar fell hard on his nose, and it bled. The Bishop, he fell on the Vicar, and murmured: "Forgive me! The night is so dark!", then was up and away with a bound. The Vicar replied with a scathing remark which by mud was most luckily drowned. Then after the Bishop he hurriedly fled, till the vicarage safely received them. The Vicar's wife gasped; then she put them to bed, and with hot-water bottles relieved them.

The Vicar soon sent her the Curate to

wake. Returning, she said with alarm: "He isn't in yet! No, I made no mistake! I hope he has come to no harm!" But just at that moment the Curate came in. They heard his light step on the stair. The Bishop, he muttered: "Original sin!" The Vicar called out: "Are you there?" The Curate, he entered with guilt on his face at this unexpected detection. A butterfly net he revealed to their gaze, and in a large jar, a collection of moths he had caught. "Pardon me!" he explained, as he gazed at the bottle enraptured. "My hobby, you know! I was somewhat detained by a splendid new species I captured."

The Bishop, he stared at the Vicar aghast. The Vicar collapsed with a moan. "Where were you tonight?" asked the Bishop at last, with a hint of relief in his tone.

"Where the finest of trophies my efforts reward. In the churchyard!" the Curate explained. "I hope you don't think it improper, my lord?"

The Bishop's expression was pained, but he choked back the words that he wanted to use, and murmured: "I'd rather you'd not. Perhaps some more suitable place you could choose, or some —er—less frequented spot?"

The Curate declared he would take the advice, and said he'd be going, and bowed, while behind him there fluttered the butterfly net that looked like a piece of a shroud.

My story is finished. There's no more to write, except that "ghosts" no more are seen cavorting around in the churchyard at night, by the good folk of Haddon-le-Green.

Jumbee*

By HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

MR. GRANVILLE LEE, a Virginian of Virginians, coming out of the World War with a lung wasted and scorched by mustard gas, was recommended by his physician to spend a winter in the spice-and-balm climate of the Lesser Antilles—the lower islands of the West Indian archipelago. He chose one of the American islands, St. Croix,

* From WEIRD TALES for September, 1926.

the old Santa Cruz—Island of the Holy Cross—named by Columbus himself on his second voyage; once famous for its rum.

It was to Jaffray Da Silva that Mr. Lee at last turned for definite information about the local magic; information which, after a two-months' residence, accompanied with marked improvement in his general health, he had come to regard as imperative, from the whetting glimpses he had received of its persistence on the island.

Contact with local customs, too, had sufficiently blunted his inherited sensibilities, to make him almost comfortable, as he sat with Mr. Da Silva on the cool gallery of that gentleman's beautiful house, in the shade of forty years' growth of bougainvillea, on a certain afternoon. It was the restful gossipy period between 5 o'clock and dinnertime. A glass jug of foaming rum-swizzel stood on the table between them.

"But, tell me, Mr. Da Silva," he urged, as he absorbed his second glass of the cooling, mild drink, "have you ever, actually, been confronted with a 'Jumbee'? —ever really seen one? You say, quite frankly, that you believe in them!"

This was not the first question about Jumbees that Mr. Lee had asked. He had consulted planters; he had spoken of the matter of Jumbees with courteous, intelligent, colored storekeepers about the town, and even in Christiansted, St. Croix's other and larger town on the north side of the island. He had even mentioned the matter to one or two coal-black sugar-field laborers; for he had been on the island just long enough to begin to understand — a little — the weird jargon of speech which Lafcadio Hearn, when he visited St. Croix many years before, had not recognized as English!

There had been marked differences in what he had been told. The planters and storekeepers had smiled, though with varying degrees of intensity, and had replied that the Danes had invented Jumbees, to keep their estate-laborers indoors after nightfall, thus ensuring a proper night's sleep for them, and minimizing the depredations upon growing crops. The laborers whom he had asked, had rolled their eyes somewhat, but, it being broad daylight at the time of the inquiries, they had broken their impassive gravity with smiles, and sought to impress Mr. Lee with their lofty contempt for the beliefs of their fellow blacks, and with queerly-phrased assurances that Jumbee is a figment of the imagination.

Nevertheless, Mr. Lee was not satisfied. There was something here that he seemed to be missing,—something extremely interesting, too, it appeared to him; something very different from "Bre'r Rabbit" and similar tales of his own remembered childhood in Virginia.

Once, too, he had been reading a book about Martinique and Guadeloupe, those ancient jewels of France's crown, and he had not read far before he met the word "Zombi." After that, he knew, at least, that the Danes had not "invented" the Jumbee. He heard, though vaguely, of the laborer's belief that Sven Garik, who had long ago gone back to his home in Sweden, and Garrity, one of the smaller planters now on the island, were "wolves!" Lycanthropy, animal-metamorphosis, it appeared, formed part of this strange texture of local belief.

Mr. Jaffray Da Silva was one-eighth African. He was, therefore, by island usage, "colored," which is as different from being "black" in the West Indies as anything that can be imagined. Mr. Da Silva had been educated in the continental European manner. In his every word and action, he reflected the faultless courtesy of his European forebears. By every right and custom of West Indian society, Mr.

Da Silva was a colored gentleman, whose social status was as clear-cut and definite as a cameo.

These islands are largely populated by persons like Mr. Da Silva. Despite the difference in their status from what it would be in North America, in the islands it has its advantages,—among them that of logic. To the West Indian mind, a man whose heredity is seven-eighths derived from gentry, as like as not with authentic coats-of-arms, is entitled to be treated accordingly. That is why Mr. Da Silva's many clerks, and everybody else who knew him, treated him with deference, addressed him as "sir," and doffed their hats in continental fashion when meeting; salutes which, of course, Mr. Da Silva invariably returned, even to the humblest, which is one of the marks of a gentleman anywhere.

JAFFRAY DA SILVA shifted one thin leg, draped in spotless white drill, over the other, and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Even my friends smile at me, Mr. Lee," he replied, with a tolerant smile, which lightened for an instant his melancholy, ivory-white countenance. "They laugh at me more or less because I admit I believe in Jumbees. It is possible that everybody with even a small amount of African blood possesses that streak of belief in magic and the like. I seem, though, to have a peculiar aptitude for it. It is a matter of *experience* with me, sir, and my friends are free to smile at me if they wish. Most of them,—well, they do not admit their beliefs as freely as I, perhaps."

Mr. Lee took another sip of the cold swizzel. He had heard how difficult it was to get Jaffray Da Silva to speak of his "experiences," and he suspected that under his host's even courtesy lay that austere pride which resents anything like ridicule, despite that tolerant smile.

"Please proceed, sir," urged Mr. Lee, and was quite unconscious that he had just used a word which, in his native South, is reserved for gentlemen of pure Caucasian blood.

"When I was a young man," began Mr. Da Silva, "about 1894, there was a friend of mine named Hilmar Iversen, a Dane, who lived here in the town, up near the Moravian Church on what the people call 'Foun'-Out Hill.' Iversen had a position under the Government, a clerk's job, and his office was in the Fort. On his way home he used to stop here almost every afternoon for a swizzel and a chat. We were great friends, close friends. He was then a man a little past fifty, a butter-tub of a fellow, very stout, and, like many of that build, he suffered from heart attacks.

"One night a boy came here for me. It was 11 o'clock, and I was just arranging the mosquito-net on my bed, ready to turn in. The servants had all gone home, so I went to the door myself, in shirt and trousers, and carrying a lamp, to see what was wanted,—or, rather, I knew perfectly well what it was,—a messenger to tell me Iversen was dead!"

Mr. Lee suddenly sat bolt-upright.

"How could you know that?" he inquired, his eyes wide.

Mr. Da Silva threw away the remains of his cigarette.

"I sometimes know things like that," he answered, slowly. "In this case, Iversen and I had been close friends for years. He and I had talked about magic and that sort of thing a great deal, occult powers, manifestations,—that sort of thing. It is a very general topic here, as you may have seen. You would hear more of it if you continued to live here and settled into the ways of the island. In fact, Mr. Lee, Iversen and I had made a compact together. The one of us who 'went out' first, was to try to warn the other of it. You see, Mr.

Lee, I had received Iversen's warning less than an hour before.

"I had been sitting out here on the gallery until 10 o'clock or so. I was in that very chair you are occupying. Iversen had been having a heart attack. I had been to see him that afternoon. He looked just as he always did when he was recovering from an attack. In fact he intended to return to his office the following morning. Neither of us, I am sure, had given a thought to the possibility of a sudden sinking spell. We had not even referred to our agreement.

"Well, it was about 10, as I've said, when all of a sudden I heard Iversen coming along through the yard below there, toward the house along that gravel path. He had, apparently, come through the gate from the Kongensgade—the King Street, as they call it nowadays—and I could hear his heavy step on the gravel very plainly. He had a slight limp. 'Heavy-crunch — light-crunch; heavy-crunch—light-crunch; plod-plod—plod-plod; old Iversen to the life; there was no mistaking his step. There was no moon that night. The half of a waning moon was due to show itself an hour and a half later, but just then it was virtually pitch-black down there in the garden.

"I got up out of my chair and walked over to the top of the steps. To tell you the truth, Mr. Lee, I rather suspected—I have a kind of aptitude for that sort of thing—that it was not Iversen himself; how shall I express it? I had the idea, from somewhere inside me, that it was Iversen trying to keep our agreement. My instinct assured me that he had just died. I can not tell you how I knew it, but such was the case, Mr. Lee.

"So I waited, over there just behind you, at the top of the steps. The footfalls came along steadily. At the foot of the steps, out of the shadow of the hibiscus bushes, it was a trifle less black than farther down the path. There was a faint illumination, too, from a lamp inside the house. I knew that if it were Iversen, himself, I should be able to see him when the footsteps passed out of the deep shadow of the bushes. I did not speak.

"The footfalls came along toward that point, and passed it. I strained my eyes through the gloom, and I could see nothing. Then I knew, Mr. Lee, that Iversen had died, and that he was keeping his agreement.

"I came back here and sat down in my chair, and waited. The footfalls began to come up the steps. They came along the floor of the gallery, straight toward me. They stopped here, Mr. Lee, just beside me. I could *feel* Iversen standing here, Mr. Lee." Mr. Da Silva pointed to the floor with his slim, rather elegant hand.

"Suddenly, in the dead quiet, I could feel my hair stand up all over my scalp, straight and stiff. The chills started to run down my back, and up again, Mr. Lee. I shook like a man with the ague, sitting here in my chair.

"I said: 'Iversen, I understand! Iversen, I'm afraid!' My teeth were chattering like castanets, Mr. Lee. I said: 'Iversen, please go! You have kept the agreement. I am sorry I am afraid, Iversen. The flesh is weak. I am not afraid of *you*, Iversen, old friend. But you will understand, man. It's not ordinary fear. My intellect is all right, Iversen, but I'm badly panic-stricken, so please go, my friend.'

"There had been silence, Mr. Lee, as I said, before I began to speak to Iversen, for the footsteps had stopped here beside me. But when I said that, and asked my friend to go, I could *feel* that he went at once, and I knew that he had understood how I meant it. It was, suddenly, Mr. Lee, as though there had never been any footsteps, if you see what I mean. It is

hard to put into words. I daresay, if I had been one of the laborers, I should have been half-way to Christiansted through the estates, Mr. Lee, but I was not so frightened that I could not stand my ground.

"AFTER I had recovered myself a little, and my scalp had ceased its prickling, and the chills were no longer running up and down my spine, I rose, and I felt extremely weary, Mr. Lee. It had been exhausting. I came into the house and drank a large tot of French brandy, and then I felt better, more like myself. I took my hurricane-lantern and lighted it, and stepped down the path toward the gate leading to the Kongensgade. There was one thing I wished to see down there at the end of the garden. I wanted to see if the gate was fastened, Mr. Lee. It was. That huge iron staple that you noticed was in place. It has been used to fasten that old gate since some time in the Eighteenth Century, I imagine. I had not supposed anyone had opened the gate, Mr. Lee, but now I knew. There were no footprints in the gravel, Mr. Lee. I looked, carefully. The marks of the bush-broom where the house-boy had swept the path on his way back from closing the gate were undisturbed, Mr. Lee.

"I was satisfied, and no longer, even a little, frightened. I came back here and sat down, and thought about my long friendship with old Iversen. I felt very sad to know that I should not see him again alive. He would never stop here again afternoons for a swizzel and a chat. About 11 o'clock I went inside the house and was preparing for bed when the rapping came at the front door. You see, Mr. Lee, I knew at once what it would mean.

"I went to the door, in shirt and trousers and stocking feet, carrying a lamp.

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WEIRD TALES

The Unique Magazine

We did not have electric light in those days. At the door stood Iversen's house-boy, a young fellow about eighteen. He was half asleep, and very much upset. He 'cut his eyes' at me, and said nothing.

" 'What is it, mon?' I asked the boy.

" 'Mistress Iversen send ax yo' sir, please come to de house. Mr. Iversen die, sir.'

" 'What time Mr. Iversen die, mon,—you hear?'

" 'I ain' able to say what o'clock, sir. Mistress Iversen come wake me where I sleep in a room in the yard, sir, an' sen' me please cahl you,—I t'ink he die aboht an hour ago, sir.'

"I put on my shoes again, and the rest of my clothes, and picked up a St. Kitts supplejack—I'll get you one; it's one of those limber, grapevine walking-sticks, a handy thing on a dark night—and started with the boy for Iversen's house.

"When we had arrived almost at the Moravian Church, I saw something ahead, near the roadside. It was then about 11:15, and the streets were deserted. What I saw made me curious to test something. I paused, and told the boy to run on ahead and tell Mrs. Iversen I would be there shortly. The boy started to trot ahead. He was pure black, Mr. Lee, but he went past what I saw without noticing it. He swerved a little away from it, and I think, perhaps, he slightly quickened his pace just at that point, but that was all."

"What did you see?" asked Mr. Lee, interrupting. He spoke a trifle breathlessly. His left lung was, as yet, far from being healed.

"The 'Hanging Jumbee,' " replied Mr. Da Silva, in his usual tones.

"Yes! There at the side of the road were three Jumbees. There's a reference to that in *The History of Stewart McCann*. Perhaps you've run across that, eh?"

Mr. Lee nodded, and Mr. Da Silva quoted:

> "There they hung, though no ladder's rung
> Supported their dangling feet.

"And there's another line in *The History,*" he continued, smiling, "which describes a typical group of Hanging Jumbee:

> "Maiden, man-child, and shrew.

"Well, there were the usual three Jumbees, apparently hanging in the air. It wasn't very light, but I could make out a boy of about twelve, a young girl, and a shriveled old woman,—what the author of *The History of Stewart McCann* meant by the word 'shrew.' He told me himself, by the way, Mr. Lee, that he had put feet on his Jumbees mostly for the sake of a convenient rime,—poetic license! The Hanging Jumbees have no feet. It is one of their peculiarities. Their legs stop at the ankles. They have abnormally long, thin legs—African legs. They are always black, you know. Their feet—if they have them—are always hidden in a kind of mist that lies along the ground wherever one sees them. They shift and 'weave,' as a full-blooded African does—standing on one foot and resting the other—you've noticed that, of course—or scratching the supporting ankle with the toes of the other foot. They do not swing in the sense that they seem to be swung on a rope,—that is not what it means; they do not twirl about. But they do—always—face the oncomer. . . .

"I walked on, slowly, and passed them; and they kept their faces to me as they always do. I'm used to that. . . .

"I went up the steps of the house to the front gallery, and found Mrs. Iversen waiting for me. Her sister was with her, too. I remained sitting with them for the

best part of an hour. Then two old black women who had been sent for, into the country, arrived. These were two old women who were accustomed to prepare the dead for burial. Then I persuaded the ladies to retire, and started to come home myself..

"It was a little past midnight, perhaps 12:15. I picked out my own hat from two or three of poor old Iversen's that were hanging on the rack, took my supplejack, and stepped out of the door onto the little stone gallery at the head of the steps.

"There are about twelve or thirteen steps from the gallery down to the street. As I started down them I noticed a third old black woman sitting, all huddled together, on the bottom step, with her back to me. I thought at once that this must be some old crone who lived with the other two,—the preparers of the dead. I imagined that she had been afraid to remain alone in their cabin, and so had accompanied them into the town,—they are like children, you know, in some ways,—and that, feeling too humble to come into the house, she had sat down to wait on the step and had fallen asleep. You've heard their proverbs, have you not? There's one that exactly fits this situation that I had imagined: "Cockroach no wear crockin' boot when he creep in fowl-house?' It means: 'Be very reserved when in the presence of your betters?' Quaint, rather! The poor souls!

"I started to walk down the steps toward the old woman. That scant half-moon had come up into the sky while I had been sitting with the ladies, and by its light everything was fairly sharply defined. I could see that old woman as plainly as I can see you now, Mr. Lee. In fact, I was looking directly at the poor old creature as I came down the steps, and fumbling in my pocket for a few cop-

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pers for her—for tobacco and sugar, as they say. I was wondering, indeed, why she was not by this time on her feet and making one of their queer little bobbing bows—'cockroach bow to fowl,' as they might say! It seemed this old woman must have fallen into a very deep sleep, for she had not moved at all, although ordinarily she would have heard me, for the night was deathly still, and their hearing is extraordinarily acute, like a cat's, or a dog's. I remember that the fragrance from Mrs. Iversen's tuberoses, in pots on the gallery railing, was pouring out in a stream that night, 'making a greeting for the moon!' It was almost overpowering.

"Just as I was putting my foot on the fifth step, there came a tiny little puff of fresh breeze from somewhere in the hills behind Iversen's house. It rustled the dry fronds of a palm-tree that was growing beside the steps. I turned my head in that direction for an instant.

"Mr. Lee, when I looked back, down the steps, after what must have been a fifth of a second's inattention, that little old black woman who had been huddled up there on the lowest step, apparently sound asleep, was gone. She had vanished utterly—and, Mr. Lee, a little white dog, about the size of a French poodle, was bounding up the steps toward me. With every bound, a step at a leap, the dog increased in size. It seemed to swell out there before my very eyes.

"Then I was, really, frightened—thoroughly, utterly frightened. I knew if that 'animal' so much as touched me, it meant death, Mr. Lee—absolute, certain death. The little old woman was a 'sheen,'—*chien,* of course. You know of lycanthropy,—wolf-change,—of course. Well, this was one of our varieties of it. I do not know what it would be called, I'm sure. 'Canicanthropy,' perhaps. I don't know, but something — something first-cousin-once-removed from lycanthropy, and on the downward scale, Mr. Lee. The old woman was a were-dog!

"Of course, I had no time to think, only to use my instinct. I swung my supplejack with all my might and brought it down squarely on that beast's head. It was only a step below me, then, and I could see the faint moonlight sparkle on the slaver about its mouth. It was then, it seemed to me, about the size of a medium-sized dog,—nearly wolf-size, Mr. Lee, and a kind of deathly white. I was desperate, and the force with which I struck caused me to lose my balance. I did not fall, but it required a moment or two for me to regain my equilibrium. When I felt my feet firm under me again, I looked about, frantically, on all sides, for the 'dog.' But it, too, Mr. Lee, like the old woman, had quite disappeared. I looked all about, you may well imagine, after that experience, in the clear, thin moonlight. For yards about the foot of the steps, there was no place—not even a small nook—where either the 'dog' or the old woman could have been concealed. Neither was on the gallery, which was only a few feet square, a mere landing.

"But there came to my ears, sharpened by that night's experiences, from far out among the plantations at the rear of Iversen's house, the pad-pad of naked feet. Someone—something—was running, desperately, off in the direction of the center of the island, back into the hills, into the deep 'bush.'

"Then, behind me, out of the house onto the gallery rushed the two old women who had been preparing Iversen's body for its burial. They were enormously excited, and they shouted at me unintelligibly. I will have to render their words for you.

" 'O, de Good Gahd protec' you,

Marster Jaffray, sir,—de Joombie, de Joombie! De 'Sheen,' Marster Jaffray! He go, sir?'

"I reassured the poor old souls, and went back home."

MR. DA SILVA fell abruptly silent. He slowly shifted his position in his chair, and reached for, and lighted, a fresh cigarette.

Mr. Lee was absolutely silent. He did not move. Mr. Da Silva resumed, deliberately, after obtaining a light.

"You see, Mr. Lee, the West Indies are different from any other place in the world, I verily believe, sir. I've said so, anyhow, many a time, although I have never been out of the islands except when I was a young man, to Copenhagen. I've told you, exactly, what happened that particular night."

Mr. Lee heaved a sigh.

"Thank you, Mr. Da Silva, very much indeed, sir," said he, thoughtfully, and made as though to rise. His service wrist-watch indicated 6 o'clock.

"Let us have a fresh swizzel, at least, before you go," suggested Mr. Da Silva. "We have a saying here in the island, that 'a man can't travel on one leg!' Perhaps you've heard it already."

"I have," said Mr. Lee.

"Knud, Knud! You hear, mon? Knud, —tell Charlotte to mash up another bal' of ice,—you hear? Quickly now," commanded Mr. Da Silva.

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WEIRD TALES

WEIRD STORY MAGAZINE IS THE ORIGINAL AND LEADING

VIRGIL FINLAY'S series of full-page drawings interpreting weird fragments of great poetry has won the favor of our readers—overwhelmingly. His inspired imagination and faultless artistic technique has caused a deluge of enthusiastic letters to pour into the editor's office. This feature will appear in WEIRD TALES every month. The current pictorial interpretation is not a fragment of weird poetry, but is a grotesque picturization of an old Cornish litany. Just wait until you see Mr. Finlay's illustration of Tam o' Shanter pursued by the warlocks!

A Club for WT Fans

Gertrude Greazeale writes from Prospect, Oregon: "Months have passed since my first letter of praise appeared in your magazine. The shock of seeing myself in print was almost too much for me. Now I emerge once more from silence and oblivion with more praises and a suggestion. Since my first effort was in honor of Virgil Finlay, I am practically gibbering with delight at sight of the full-length picture by that matchless artist. This new feature is a grand idea, I can hardly wait for the next one! Incidentally, although his color work is beautiful, still, he expresses the weird more truly in black and white; the shading is far more effective in that medium, the faces and figures appear more life-like. Now, a bouquet for the Eyrie. I find this department almost as interesting as the fiction. The letters prove that people of intelligence and education are among your most enthusiastic readers. In view of that fact, why is it that I seldom or never meet anyone, intelligent or otherwise, who is interested in the weird and unusual? My friends and acquaintances express either repugnance or amusement when they find me with a copy of WEIRD TALES. My suggestion: Why can't the Eyrie organize a club for lovers of the weird, with a membership pin designed by Finlay? This to be worn so that WEIRD TALES fans may recognize each other, and may get acquainted without the formality of an introduction, if so desired. In these parts, kindred spirits seem to be as scarce as hen's teeth, but a club might unearth a few in my vicinity. Special greetings to Gertrude Hemken, whose 'zippy' letters are a great source of enjoyment. Now I shall crawl back into my shell and await developments!" [This letter is but one of many requests that we have received suggesting a get-together department in WEIRD TALES. If any of you, the readers, desire to correspond with other lovers of weird literature and exchange ideas, we suggest that you send your name and address to WEIRD TALES Club Department, in care of this magazine. If enough readers are interested, we will mail the list of names and addresses each month to those who wish to be enrolled for this service. This, we think, would be more satisfactory than to publish the names and addresses in the Eyrie.—THE EDITOR.]

Into Fairyland

Louise Gayle writes from Rome, Georgia: "A friend told me about WEIRD TALES and I have just finished reading my first one. Half through the first story my main thought was, Where have you been all my life? Then I decided to write and say thanks a million to the editors. My favorite story in this copy is *The Black Statue*, with *Child of Atlantis* as runner-up. Where do the writers get such imagination? Reading WEIRD TALES is like stepping from your own room right into fairyland. So I say, long live your magazine and such writers as Mary Counselman, Edmond Hamilton and B. Wallis. I am going to read every copy after this."

Poe Is His Favorite

Thomas Gelbert writes from Buffalo: "*The Sea-Witch* gets my vote for first place in the December issue. I heartily approve of the series of full-page pictures illustrating passages in famous literature. Poe is my favorite author, and to have Virgil illustrate his *Raven* and *Israfel* is something to look forward to. I would like to see more reprints by the old masters, such as Gautier, Rousseau, Maupassant, Irving, Turgeniev, and others. It is a waste of valuable space to print stories in WEIRD TALES that have already appeared therein before."

Child of Atlantis

Ray T. Leslie writes from Toronto: "I am a constant reader of WT and have a love for the bizarre and unusual in fiction. To me WT is a great source of diversion from boring realities. When I am reading such engrossing tales as H. P. L.'s *The Shunned House* and G. G. Pendarves' *Thing of Darkness* I live in the horror surrounding these stories. This month's top story as I read your magazine was certainly *Child of Atlantis*, a weird tale if ever one was written. This story begins where most happy-ending stories finish: on the honeymoon."

The September Issue

Harry S. Weatherby, of Millington, Maryland, writes: "September's edition of WEIRD TALES was one of the best I've ever read, and I have been reading your magazine intermittently for twelve years. I particularly like the good old-fashioned ghost yarn, and I think your shorter stories are better than the longer space-fillers. My hat is off to Manly Wade Wellman for his short tale, *School for the Unspeakable*. I was reading it late at night and it certainly made my flesh crawl. I want to read more stories by this author. Second best was your new serial story, *The Lake of Life* by Edmond Hamilton. I have always praised Mr. Hamilton's efforts; he surely knows how to transplant you into other worlds. The rime *Psychopompos* by H. P. Lovecraft was thrilling. It is with a feeling of deep regret that I think of Mr. Lovecraft's passing. His will be a great loss to the literary world."

BACK COPIES

Because of the many requests for back issues of WEIRD TALES, the publishers do their best to keep a sufficient supply on hand to meet all demands. This magazine was established early in 1923 and there has been a steady drain on the supply of back copies ever since. At present, we have the following back numbers on hand for sale:

1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
Jan.	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.
Feb.	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.	....
Mar.	Mar.	Mar.	Mar.	....
Apr.	Apr.	Apr.	Apr.	....
May	May	May	May	....
June	June	June	June	....
July	July	July	July	....
....	....	....	Aug.	....
Sept.	Sept.	Sept.	Sept.	....
Oct.	Oct.	Oct.	Oct.	....
Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	....
Dec.	Dec.	Dec.	Dec.	....

These back numbers contain many fascinating stories. If you are interested in obtaining any of the back copies on this list please hurry your order because we can not guarantee that the list will be as complete as it now is within the next 30 days. The price on all back issues is 25c per copy. Mail all orders to:

WEIRD TALES

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Impressive Illustrations

J. Vernon Shea, Jr., writes from Pittsburgh: "The most impressive thing about the December issue is the Virgil Finlay illustrations. The one for *The Black Stone Statue* is one of his best, an especially shuddery thing; and I applaud his new series of illustrations from famous poems, which answers my request for illustrations outside the magazine proper. Of the stories, I liked best Mary Elizabeth Counselman's *The Black Stone Statue,* although it left open a number of questions: how did the thing eat, if everything it touched Midas-like turned to stone? How did it mate? I was very glad to see Donald Wandrei appear once more, with his genuinely eery *Uneasy Lie the Drowned,* and hope he will be represented soon again. The recent experiments in extra-sensory perception conducted at Duke University lent especial interest to Claude Farrère's odd little story. Edmond Hamilton departed for once from his formula, and *Child of Atlantis* is one of his best stories."

Incredible

Professor T. O. Mabbott writes from New York City: "December — A grand issue — *The Sea-Witch* best, *Polaris* notable, and *The Keen Eyes of Kara Kédi* a real masterpiece. Seabury Quinn is a master of technique, but the *Flames* was not up to his standard, as I found the natural part of the story too hard to believe. My passion in a weird tale is credibility, when one is reading it. There are things that are purely supernatural and must be taken as such, there are other things that are physically possible but unlikely to happen, and there is a third kind of impossibility, where dimension enters in. The last two are dangerous, as they arouse an unbelieving mood, and so put one out of the acceptance of the frankly supernatural. So I wished the curtain had only been put back yearly in the *Black Pharaoh,* because a foot a day for some thousand years is too many miles to walk in an evening. The priest could have called the last night of the year, or the day for moving been fixed by the stars. But the *Black Pharaoh* is a fine tale. *Child of Atlantis* and *The Black Stone Statue* however are completely worked out, nothing incredible in the wrong way; the same is true of *Laocoon.* One word of defense for the incredulous attitude of Doctor Trowbridge; it is a convention for the narrator to be a person to whom things must be explained, as they have to be told to the reader. In a series it tires the old reader, but a writer has to keep his work intelligible to the reader who begins in the middle of a series. Suter's ending to the *Abyss* also seemed to me justified, for even if it did not involve really supernatural things, it did take us into the world of the half-conscious and delirious mind, which is the first step into the weird, as telepathy is the second, though neither is magic or ghostly."

Trudy

Gertrude Hemken writes from Chicago: "*Wow!* Wotta nude by Finlay! Honestly, she looks almost real, 'ceptin' her nose ends almost too sharply. Coming along with Finlay, I'm sure it will be interesting to see his full-page pictures—particularly Poe's *Raven* and *The Skeleton in Armor,* which poem ranks among my favorites. May I suggest one of my other favorites—which I have mentioned in a previous letter? Goethe's *Erl-King.* Or is he too vague a character? *The Sea-Witch* is as strange and romantic as the author's name. Never have I read a tale so pleasing—somehow this Heldra Helstrom calls to mind that lovely tale of Fouqué and its heroine Undine. Water people—Norse legends—it's all so fascinating and seems so true, just as a dream seems true to the dreamer. It's a story to be remembered a long, long time, and I will keep it in my mind's library along with sagas, myths, legends and folklore. This is the top story in the December issue, and ranks above the others from many issues back. Robert Bloch really has something there with his Black Pharaoh's prophecy—can it be that any one man can foresee what is to come for thousands upon thousands of years? It's a question for meditation. *The Black Stone Statue* had a Medusa tinge to it, although so very different. I rather liked it. Second best yarn was Quinn's *Flames of Vengeance.* Somehow the author seemed to deviate from the stilted pattern into which he was falling—and I am glad of it. This differed from narsty ghosts and sperrits—this was Hindoo magic—about which there is such a mystery and which seems to remain unexplained through the ages. Well, Mr. Hamilton: Although I don't like robots and superior intelligences (if such word there be), *Child of Atlantis* proved interesting—

as all tales of Atlantis interest me. However, sir—permit me to correct you. On page 712 when David is accosted by the two Europeans, the German *Leutnant* should have asked *'Woher kommen Sie?'* not *'Woher kommst du?'* In speaking to a stranger, a German will always use the polite form *'Sie'* unless that stranger be a child or one beneath the speaker. Ah!—a cat tale (no puns) *Kara Kédi* was a tense enough story—but the ending was somehow dull. However, I did like the author's description of Kara Kédi—its long legs and lithe body. I'm sure I would like him—just as I like all cats. HPL's short fantasies are so dream-like—rather sweet—rather puzzling. *Polaris* is a fine little one—much to my taste. Looking through comments from Eyrieites, I see where Pete Thompson of Seattle voices practically the same thots I do re Mr. Pryke's letter *par excellence*. I find mutual sentiments with G. W. Skora of Tucson—who is carried away into living the story—even as do I."

Finlay's Verse-illustrations

Manly Wade Wellman writes from New York City: "Let me get my two cents' worth over, in favor of Virgil Finlay's full-page verse-illustrations. This painstaking young artist is one of your notable discoveries. My limited art education gives me some appreciation of the time and trouble he must consume in doing that stippling and cross-hatching, and he has withal a mighty feeling for the macabre. Maybe I'm prejudiced toward the short-short form, but I pick Wandrei's *Uneasy Lie the Drowned* as the finest in the December issue. Incidentally, I am gratified at numerous appreciations in the Eyrie of my own efforts to be horrible in small compass."

Competition

Arthur L. Widner, Jr., writes from Bryantville, Massachusetts: "They say competition is the life of trade and it seems to be true also in the case of artists. The picture of the Donna Marchesi on the October cover is the best Brundage cover I have yet seen. In fact, I would say it was the best weird cover I have yet seen by *anybody*. I can just imagine Mrs. Brundage wielding a wicked crayon, and muttering to herself, 'So that young whippersnapper, Virgil Finlay, thinks he can show *me* up! Hmmph—I'll show

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him something about beautiful gals.' No doubt the 'young whippersnapper' will now go to work and turn out something just too ultra-ultra."

Those Finlay Drawings

James Forrest Gall, Jr., writes from Portland, Oregon: "For the past ten years I have been a silent, content reader. Having no reason to complain, I have never written. After reading your magnificent December issue, though, I had to express my delight somehow. Finlay's superb full-page drawing was a great surprize. Do continue them! In Virgil Finlay, you have a great illustrator. His work is so gripping in its personal and original touch. Each picture has an atmosphere of its own. Every detail is carried to its fullest interpretation. Notice the eyes, mouth, even the hands convey their message of weirdness. The illustration for this issue's *Fane of the Black Pharaoh* is exquisite in its adapted form of true stylized Egyptian art. The cover, also, was excellent. I share with others their deep personal loss in the deaths of Howard Phillips Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard. H. P. L. was to me the absolute best in contemporary 'weirds.' His death was a strangely personal loss to me. I still cannot accept the fact that I shall no longer be able to read his immortal stories. *The Sea-Witch* by Nictzin Dyalhis was my favorite choice of this issue. Barbaric, deeply moving in its beauty, time stood still for me when I read this gem. Robert Bloch again was superb. *The Black Stone Statue* is written in that same manner which made *The Three Marked Pennies* so popular. *All* your stories were tops."

This Unspeakable Horror

Joseph C. Kempe writes from Detroit: "In my estimation, Young Blochinvar from out of the West did not reach his usual standard in his November offering, *The Secret of Sebek*. Somehow the ultimate disclosure of the fact that Sebek was the real McCoy seemed a rather tame apex for the pyramid of horror that had been built up to it. And the 'How-Shall-I-Ever-Forget-This-Unspeakable-Horror' opening is getting a bit outworn, isn't it? Is it really necessary to start effective weird yarns thataway? The inimitable Cahill fellow and several others seem to sidestep it very well. The de Grandin tale was much better than *Pledged to the Dead*, in the October issue. I think Jules is a swell WT character. I've never yet read one of his exploits that didn't fascinate me in some way and to some extent. This latest one is easily the best story in the November issue. *Dread Summons* by Ernst was good. However, this writer's stories sometimes give me the impression of having been produced on the assembly-line of the Ford or Chevie plant up here—sorta mechanical. Since this is my first letter, I wish to make a comment on an old story—a comment I've never had the chance to make before. That story is *Loot of the Vampire*, by Thorp McClusky, which you printed some time ago. I think that story contained the best explanation of vampirism ever to be expounded. Few authors even attempt an explanation. Among your literary novæ—for which this year seems to have been so prolific—I think H. Sivia shows decided promise. I read his two short-shorts, *The Interview* and *The Last of Mrs. Debrugh*, with much interest, and I hope you publish something longer by this author in the near future. His writing isn't splashed all over by great daubs of horrific adjectives. I might also mention that the best illustration for the year—by far—is Finlay's illustration for *Dread Summons* in the November issue. As a study in human terror it has never been surpassed! I am waiting anxiously for the December WEIRD TALES."

Dyalhis

Charles H. Bert writes from Philadelphia: "A thousand hails for the return of Nictzin Dyalhis, one of your best writers. *The Sea-Witch* was refreshing like a soft summer's breeze in comparison with the horror yarns. I like Dyalhis' style of writing; no other author can compare with him in his excellent choice of words and phrases. The plot was excellent and the way it was handled gave a refreshing new twist to the old theme—an ancient curse and a weird revenge. I liked the story because of the Northmen beliefs and superstitions. You must convince Dyalhis to write more often, his stories are too rare. I can recall *The Eternal Conflict*, *The Dark Lore*, and *The Oath of Hul Jok* as marvelous yarns, and it would not hurt your reputation any if you reprinted them. . . . I liked the cat story by the French writer, *The Keen Eyes of Kara Kédi*. Good plot and good writing. I felt a sort of spiritual affinity with *Polaris* by H. P. Lovecraft. I am an

amateur astronomer myself and I know those heavenly bodies cited by friend Lovecraft well."

Breath-taking Beauty

James O'Regan writes from Springfield, Missouri: "Your new feature by Virgil Finlay will undoubtedly be lauded by your readers. His first illustration, of Sterling's superb passage, is genuinely horrible; yet there is a breath-taking beauty about it. Vampiric illustrations are common, but never have I seen one quite so startling as Virgil's. Words cannot describe my feeling when I saw that lovely, loathsome creature slinking by the grave-stones. The whirling fog and wheeling bats added a distinct touch of horror. One of my friends chanced to see the illustration, and he became a trifle upset. But this is quite understandable. I can't say how I enjoyed *The Black Stone Statue* by Mary E. Counselman. The repellent horror in the story was excellently depicted, and Finlay's drawing was splendid. I have enjoyed every issue of WT since I first became a reader of your magazine. The type of stories I prefer are those with some fearful terror lurking in every page. I gloat over slimy, bestial things, spawned in some dank, unknown place. I thrill over evil, creeping creatures of the dark, inhabitants of a crumbling tomb. Perhaps my taste is just a bit too shuddery, but there are many other readers with the same preferences."

A Splendid Piece of Fantasy

B. M. Reynolds writes from North Adams, Massachusetts: "Mr. Nictzin Dyalhis certainly turned out a splendid piece of fantastic writing in *The Sea-Witch*. The theory of reincarnation is a particularly fascinating subject, one which, I believe, should appeal to a great majority of your readers. Many fine tales in the past have been written around this theme. This story was well constructed and well written. The characters were portrayed vividly, seeming almost to step out of the pages to become real living and breathing human beings. Mr. Dyalhis likewise showed a keen knowledge of the Æsir and Norse mythology in general which made a convincing background for the tale. Second best was H. P. L.'s little fantasy, *Polaris*, one of the finest short-shorts this year. Third: Miss Counselman's *The Black Stone Statue* —unusual theme, nicely done. *The Voyage*

NEXT MONTH

DREADFUL SLEEP

By JACK WILLIAMSON

A MARVELOUS tale is this new serial novel by the author of "The Wand of Doom" and "Golden Blood." It is a story of weird monstrosities from Saturn, that lay buried under the antarctic ice since prehistoric times, chained in a dreadful slumber—the story of their ghastly awakening, and the doom that oppressed the world—the story of the weird and glorious being, Maru-Mora, and the lovely Carol Lee—the story of a great scientist mad with power.

THIS is a romantic story, a thrilling story, a tragic story. Those of you who remember "Golden Blood" by the same author will not want to miss this new tale from his pen. It will begin

in the March issue of

WEIRD TALES

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of the Neutralia by B. Wallis is also a very interesting and, perhaps, prophetic novel. Let's have more yarns of the space-rovers. During the year 1937 you have given us several outstanding stories. After carefully checking over the last twelve issues, I find ten which rank among the best of all time: *The Globe of Memories* by Seabury Quinn, *The Guardian of the Book* by Henry Hasse, *The Last Archer* by Earl Peirce, Jr., *The Headless Miller of Kobold's Keep* by G. Garnet, *The Haunter of the Dark* by H. P. Lovecraft, *The Black Kiss* by Robert Bloch and Henry Kuttner, *The Last Pharaoh* by Thomas P. Kelley, *The Lake of Life* by Edmond Hamilton, *Quest of the Starstone* by C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner, and *The Sea-Witch* by Nictzin Dyalhis."

December Issue a Pip!

Clifton Hall writes from Los Angeles: "Wow! WEIRD TALES doesn't believe in doing things half-way, does it? What have they done now but top off their greatest year with the best number I recall having ever read! Yes, that December issue was a pip! There were so many good yarns that it is difficult to select the best three. However, after some deliberation, I'd say that *The Sea-Witch* slips in with first honors. Let's have some more from Nictzin Dyalhis, who has been strangely silent the past year or so. Lovecraft's short jewel, *Polaris,* comes next in spite of its brevity. That one belongs with the weird classics. For third I'd say Hamilton's *Child of Atlantis,* although *Pane of the Black Pharaoh* and *The Black Stone Statue* are close behind. Even if this were all, the December WT would be the best in many moons. But there are also *Uneasy Lie the Drowned,* and *Laocoon,* plus a pretty good one in *Flames of Vengeance!* The cover was catchy, and Virgil Finlay's illustration of the vampire was a swell new feature. And now I have a suggestion to make. Why not have all WT fans vote once a year to select the best story of the past twelve months, just as one of the movie magazines selects the best film of each year? You could use one page as a sort of plaque, with the winners listed, year by year. I sincerely hope that you will print this suggestion, as I believe that many readers will agree with me. I think I'd select Quinn's *The Globe of Memories* as 1937's best, with *Fessenden's Words* second and *The Thing on the Doorstep* third. Why not see what the other WT-fanciers think?"

Concise Comments

Charles H. Chandler writes from Wooster, Ohio: "*The Lake of Life* is swell—the more Hamilton the better. Who was the fellow in an earlier story in WT—a couple of years back—a man with a steel hand—interplanetary adventurer? If any more stories about him, or by the same author, are available, let's have 'em! The Brundage covers are another distinctive feature of WT—they're good."

Donald A. Wollheim writes from New York City: "The full-page pictures by Finlay represent one of the best ideas ever. They should give him ample room to portray some of the weirdest drawings that any artist may hope to draw. But why not have a number of copies of each run off on quality slick paper for separate sale? They should make fine pictures for adorning the den of a weirdist."

Robert J. Hoyer writes from Chicago: "*The Sea-Witch* was a grand tale. I dunno, there's something about that fellow Dyalhis' stories that gets me. I've been a fan of his since *The Sapphire Goddess.*"

Andrew J. Wolsey writes from London: "May I take this opportunity of congratulating you on your success in printing, to my mind, the most thrilling serial ever written, namely, *The Last Pharaoh?*"

Most Popular Story

Readers, let us know which story you like best in this issue of WEIRD TALES, and why. Your criticism of the stories we print will help us to keep the magazine as you desire it. In the December issue, that strange tale by Nictzin Dyalhis, *The Sea-Witch,* is far out in front in popularity, as shown by your votes and letters. Address your comments to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 840 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago.

COMING NEXT MONTH

PLACING his two enormous, shapeless hands on the table, Dmitri heaved himself to his feet, and a tremendous bellow issued from his barrel-like chest. That summons, though the words were lost in a gulf of sound, was unmistakable, and presently the door opened and the little man, prim and neat and wholly a colorless personality, entered.

"Yes, Master."

Dmitri stood beside the table, his right hand resting heavily on the polished oak.

"Sit down, little Stepan."

The small man, the ghost of a pleased smile on his peasant face, sat down primly in the oaken chair and looked about the room with child-like pleasure. Obviously he was enjoying to the uttermost his small moment.

"You would prefer the sleep, little one? It is not necessary; we have been through this experiment many times together, you and I."

"I would prefer the sleep, Master," the little man said, with a slight shudder. "Despite myself my eyes flinch from the flame——"

"Very well." Dmitri's voice was casual and low. "Relax, little one, and sleep. Sleep soundly—"

He turned from his servant and picked up the fifty-cent piece. Turning it over and over in the fingers of his left hand he began to speak, slowly.

"I have told this subject's subconscious that its body is invulnerable to physical injury. Watch!

The little man was sitting erect in the massive chair. His eyes were closed, his face immobile. Dmitri stooped, lifted an arm, let it fall, then straightened triumphantly and surveyed his silent audience. Suddenly, then, a roaring streamer of bluish flame lanced across the room. Dmitri had set the gasoline torch alight.

A woman was babbling hysterically. But above the steady moan of the flame Dmitri said loudly "There is no cause for alarm. Now, observe closely. I am going to go far beyond the ordinary hypnotist's procedure——"

He carefully picked up, with the pliers, the fifty-cent piece. For a long moment he let the moaning flame play on the coin, until both coin and plier-tips glowed angrily.

Calmly, without warning, he dropped the burning coin on his servant's naked wrist!

A woman screamed. But, then, gasps of relief eddied from the tense audience. For, although the glowing whiteness of the coin had scarcely begun to fade into cherry-red, the man Stepan had shown no sign that he felt pain! There was no stench of burning flesh in the room. Even the fine hairs on the back of the servant's wrist, hairs that touched and curled delicately above the burning coin, showed not the slightest sign of singeing! . . .

You will not want to miss this strange story of an unscrupulous hypnotist and the frightful thing he called Stepan, who was immune to destruction while his master lived. This story will be printed complete in the March issue of WEIRD TALES:

THE THING ON THE FLOOR

By Thorp McClusky

——Also——

INCENSE OF ABOMINATION

By SEABURY QUINN

A daring story of Devil-worship, the Black Mass, strange suicides, and the salvation of one who had sinned greatly yet was truly repentant. A tale of Jules de Grandin.

BEYOND THE WALL OF SLEEP

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

What strange, splendid yet terrible experiences came to the poor mountaineer in the hours of sleep —a story of a supernal being from Algol, the Demon-Star.

DREADFUL SLEEP

By JACK WILLIAMSON

A thrilling tale, a romantic and tragic tale of weird-scientific story of the awakening of the fearsome beings that lay in dreadful slumber under the antarctic ice, and the strange doom that befell the world.

THE SHADOW ON THE SCREEN

By HENRY KUTTNER

A weird story of Hollywood, and the grisly horror that cast its dreadful shadow across the silver screen as an incredible motion-picture was run off.

March Issue WEIRD TALES - - - - Out April 1

What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as fundamental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the "Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis," abbreviated by the initials "AMORC." The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

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